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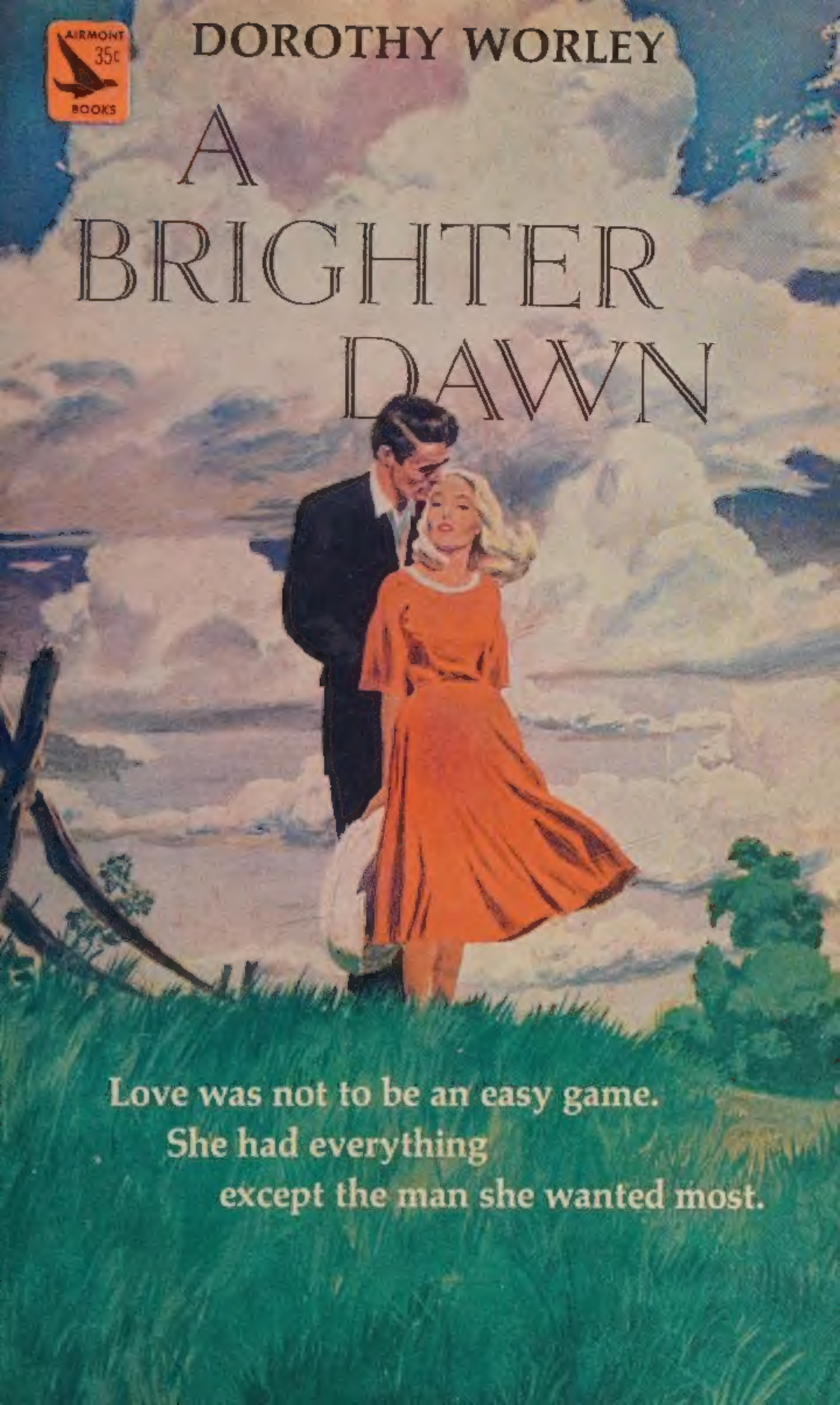
DOROTHY WORLEY

A BRIGHTER DAWN



Love was not to be an easy game.
She had everything
except the man she wanted most.

A Brighter Dawn

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DOROTHY WORLEY

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A Brighter Dawn

CHAPTER ONE

Marianna Marshall, cantering through the park on her gaited thoroughbred, reined in her horse as another rider came alongside.

"I thought you said you weren't riding in the early morning any more," Stanley Webster said, his voice faintly accusing.

"Can't I change my mind?" the girl asked with a slight shrug.

"You not only can, but you often do," the man said, and taking a deep breath, added, "I hope there's one thing you won't change it about."

Marianna held up her left hand, and the diamond on her third finger sparkled in the sunlight.

"I'm still wearing it," she said, smiling lazily.

"So far," Stan conceded. "But knowing your propensity for changes, I'd like to set the date up a little. You're too whimsical, and I see no reason for waiting until October."

"The reason is that's the way I want it." There was an edge to Marianna's voice. "Surely a girl should be allowed to set her own wedding day."

"O.K.," Stan said reluctantly. "October it is. But please don't put it off again."

He knew she would if she wanted to. Marianna Marshall always did exactly as she pleased. Her indulgent aunt and uncle, Mary and Jack Marshall, with whom she had lived since her parents died when she was less than a year old, had never denied her anything. Marianna had her way in all things.

Stanley Webster had tried for several years to get her to marry him, since she was eighteen, even before, but it was only last week that she had said yes, setting the wedding date six months off. That hadn't pleased Stan; he would have preferred an immediate marriage, but knowing the futility of arguing with Marianna, he had acquiesced.

It had taken Marianna a long time to make up her mind. She hadn't been sure she was in love with Stan. Perhaps one factor that had influenced her was the knowledge that

he was the most eligible man in town, and that he could have practically any girl he might want. But being Marianna, she had kept him uncertain.

"I love the early morning," she said impulsively. "Everything is so lovely and fresh. Isn't it a beautiful day? It sparkles!"

"You sparkle so yourself, I don't notice the day," Stan said. "You're so vitally alive. Do you know how very beautiful you are, darling?"

"Am I, Stan?" Marianna turned her deep blue widely spaced eyes toward him with a smile. Her voice was husky and provocative.

"You know it darn well yourself, but you just like to hear people say it."

"Of course," Marianna agreed serenely. "What woman doesn't?"

They were meeting three other riders, two men and a girl. Stanley Webster spoke to them, and they responded pleasantly, their glances taking in Marianna's breath-taking silver-blonde loveliness, the perfection of her riding clothes.

When they had passed, Marianna said carelessly, "Wasn't that Dr. Randall? Dr. Philip Randall? The older man with the touch of gray in his hair? Who were the others?"

"Another doctor, Dr. Bill Drake. He and Dr. Randall are both on the staff at Walker Memorial. The girl is Dr. Randall's nurse, Glenda Carlson."

"I didn't know that doctors went around with their nurses."

"Dr. Randall does as he pleases. He probably invited Bill Drake to go along. I understand Drake is in love with the girl."

"How do you know so much about them?"

"I was at Walker some time ago, remember? With the appendix? I met Glenda then. We got to be fairly good friends before I left."

Marianna's eyebrows went up a little. "I've never heard you speak of her."

"No. Of course she doesn't go with our crowd. I've seen her a few times since I left the hospital."

"You mean you've dated her?" There was surprise in Marianna's voice.

"A couple of times, and I've run into her here and there."

Musingly, Marianna said, "I've heard that all his women patients are in love with him—Dr. Randall, I mean. I suppose that girl is, too."

"I don't think she is, although I know she admires him—has him on a pedestal. But she dates Bill Drake, and he's wild about her. I've heard Dr. Randall is a misogynist, that his only love is his profession. But why are we talking about them? Let's talk about us."

What Stan didn't know was that Marianna had come to the park this morning for the express purpose of seeing Dr. Philip Randall. She had passed him riding there before, and she wanted to see him again. She wasn't sure just why, unless she was intrigued by his reputed indifference to women. She had said at a tea a few days before, when a group was discussing him, that *any* man *could* be won over by a woman. And she had been somewhat nettled when a woman said, "But not Philip Randall."

Marianna would have been agreeably surprised had she known that the three riders who had passed were talking about her now.

"Wasn't that the Marshall girl?" Glenda Carlson was saying.

"Marianna Marshall, yes," Bill said.

"I know the man, Stanley Webster," Glenda said. "Remember he was at Walker several months ago for an appendectomy?"

Bill said, "I understand they're engaged."

"Miss Marshall and Stanley Webster? Well, they're two of a kind and should be suited to each other. Darlings of the rich, and with a good opinion of themselves," Glenda commented.

"She's very lovely," Dr. Randall said. "I've noticed her pictures in the papers from time to time."

"Yes," Glenda agreed, "she really *is* beautiful, but they say she's a spoiled brat. Anyone can be lovely who's always had everything—clothes, perfumes, horses, cars, furs, and jewels. I wonder what it would be like to have Aladdin's lamp in one's hand."

"Would you change places with her?" Dr. Randall asked, smiling.

"Me?" Glenda exclaimed. "Well, no-o. I can't really imagine leading a life like that; it would bore me to death. Still, I might like to try it for a while as a diversion."

"You'd be bored to death in a week," Dr. Randall said

cheerfully. "Day after day of idling, of dancing all night—You'd soon want to be back in uniform."

"I suppose you're right. I don't think I could be happy away from the hospital for long."

You wouldn't be happy anywhere where you couldn't see Philip Randall every day, Bill thought resentfully. He and Glenda sometimes argued about that, Glenda maintainmg that her loyalty and admiration for Dr. Randall was entirely professional. She had never known him to be interested in any woman. There had been hints of an unhappy love affair when he was much younger, but some people said he was so wholly the doctor that he had no time for romance. He was thirty-eight years old, but by reason of his reserve and the sprinkling of gray in his dark hair, he sometimes seemed a bit older.

To Marianna Marshall, Dr. Randall's reputed indifference to women presented a challenge. Every man she had ever met had wanted a date with her; it was a simple matter to impress them with her beauty and charm, to make them fall in love with her. Now she would like to meet Dr. Philip Randall and see if she could get through that supposedly impregnable armor.

Stanley broke in on her thoughts to suggest breakfast at the tearoom they were passing, and when they were seated with their coffee, Marianna said, "Stan, I'd like to meet that man."

"What man?" Stan asked blankly.

"Philip Randall, of course."

"Why *of course?*"

"Well, we were talking about him." Marianna sounded pettish.

"No more than about Bill Drake," Stan said contrarily. "And why should you want to meet Dr. Randall, or any other man? You're engaged to me, you know."

"Even if I am," Marianna said coolly, "I'm not caged, nor will I ever be. I—I—" Her voice faltered as she looked up to see who had entered the room. The two doctors and the nurse.

In the moment they stood there uncertainly, Marianna said to Stan in a low, urgent voice, "You *could* ask them over, you know."

Stan glanced at her, surprised to note the lilt of excitement in her voice, the brightness in her eyes, and in the moment he hesitated, Dr. Randall glanced at his watch, said

something to his friends, and went out, leaving the other two standing there.

"Still want me to ask them?" Stan asked a little derisively.

Marianna shrugged. "Oh, don't bother. And I've changed my mind about breakfast, too. The coffee is all I want."

Stan was irritated. "You would have wanted it if Philip Randall hadn't gone out," he said.

Marianna looked at him, and her eyes flashed. "Don't nag me, Stan; I won't have it, understand?"

"I'm not nagging you. But I think there's something you've got to learn, darling, and that is that all the presents on the Christmas tree are not for you."

"They are if I want them," Marianna said arrogantly. "And please, Stan, if we're going to get along, don't argue with me or try to change me. You've known me a long time, you know exactly what I'm like; if I don't suit you, you'd better make up your mind, because I have no intention of changing. I like myself just the way I am." She glanced around the room imperiously. "Let's go, I'm not in the mood to stay longer."

CHAPTER TWO

Marianna Marshall lay straight and still in the narrow bed and thought, *If I keep my eyes closed, the dizziness might not be so bad. Maybe the walls will stop shivering and the furniture will stay in place.* But she found that keeping her eyes closed didn't help much; she still had the floating sensation.

She had a hazy recollection of someone giving her a shot in the hip and hearing the word Dramamine, and after that for a little while the dizziness was better. But now it was coming back.

She opened her eyes and looked around the room. White walls, white furniture, white curtains, and the bed was high. *A hospital!* What was she doing here? What had brought her here, and when? Her mind seemed cloudy. She tried to concentrate, and things began coming back, slowly and vaguely.

She remembered that she and Stan were coming from the club. They were almost to the top of the hill when the headlights of a car cutting from behind a big truck loomed ahead, directly in their path. She remembered thinking *This is it!* and knowing that she did not want to die. There had been nothing Stan could do. He couldn't have pulled out of the way of the oncoming car, because there was a deep ravine on either side of the incline. The cars had met head-on. The impact was terrific. And there her memory stopped. She had been unconscious ever since until just a short while ago.

Her next consciousness was of this room, and of pain. There had been a few moments of lucidity, and when the pain became intense, there had been the sensation of a needle stinging, then blessed relief.

She wondered how seriously she was hurt. She moved her arms and legs and was thankful they were still intact. There was a bandage on her head, and her back didn't feel just right. She reached a hand around, and her fingers came in contact with a hard surface, and she realized she was in a cast. An effort to raise her head made the dizziness worse.

When she opened her eyes again, she became aware of two white-clad figures beside her bed, a man and a woman. She managed a smile and said weakly, "Hi."

The man smiled in return.

"I've seen you somewhere," Marianna said a little breathlessly. "Who are you?"

"I'm Dr. Randall," the man said. "And this is my nurse, Miss Carlson. How long have you been awake?"

Glenda Carlson said, "I'm sure she was not awake when I left the room a couple of minutes ago."

Marianna's eyes went from nurse to doctor, and she said, "That's right. I seem to have come awake suddenly. What happened? Why am I here, and what makes me so dizzy?"

"That will pass," the doctor said encouragingly. "How do you feel? Any pain now?"

"Only when I move." Marianna took a deep breath. "I remember the wreck. Stan? The man who was with me, is he all right?"

"He was luckier than you were. Miraculously, he escaped with only minor injuries. He's already been discharged."

"How long have I been here?"

"Over a week."

She was silent a moment, then she asked, "What about the people in the other car?"

"There was only one, a teen-ager. He's dead," the doctor said flatly.

With some of her old arrogance Marianna said, "That's too bad, but it was his fault. He took a chance."

"Yes, that has been established. Also that he had been drinking. He was in the staggering stage a few moments before when he left a tavern. People have testified to that, and your friend, Mr. Webster, has been cleared of any responsibility in the boy's death."

"Of course. There was nothing Stan could do, and I'm surprised we were not killed, too. It was horrible seeing that car coming straight toward us." Her voice had risen noticeably, and the doctor said quietly, "Don't think about it. It's all over. Just remember you were lucky and try to concentrate on getting well."

"What's wrong with me, Doctor? Why is the bandage on my head?"

"You have a hairline injury. It wasn't bad."

"Is that why I have the headache?"

"Do you have it now?"

"Yes, in a fuzzy sort of way. There's a dull ache in the back of my neck."

The doctor and the nurse exchanged glances, but maintaining his poker face, the doctor said soothingly, "If it gets worse, Miss Carlson will give you something for it."

"I'm not worried about the headache, but why am I in a cast? Is something wrong with my back?"

"Injured vertebrae, and you have a hip injury. A bone injury."

"Am I going to be all right?" Marianna's deep blue eyes looked enormous in her heart-shaped white face.

"Of course." The confidence in the doctor's voice, in his smile, was reassuring, and Marianna gave a great sigh of relief.

"May Stan come to see me?"

"Soon," Dr. Randall promised, "but not right away. We want you to continue to be quiet a little longer."

"Has anyone been in to see me?"

"No one has been here except your nurses. You have a different one every eight hours. Your uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Marshall, have been here, of course, but you were asleep, and we told them we didn't want visitors yet. There have been many calls about you."

"And flowers," Glenda Carlson said, smiling.

Marianna's eyes moved around the room. "Looks like a florist shop, doesn't it? And you mean I've been unconscious the whole time?"

"You mumbled words now and—" The doctor smiled. Marianna's eyes had closed suddenly, and she had drifted back into sleep. He motioned the nurse to follow him to the hall. "I want her to be sure she's going to be all right. Above all, don't let her worry."

Glenda raised her eyes to his. "But is she going to be all right, Doctor?"

"We hope." Dr. Randall took a deep breath, and Glenda knew he wasn't sure.

It wasn't often that the doctor wanted to spare Glenda Carlson for nursing; she was too valuable in surgery. But this case had him puzzled, and he had asked Glenda to take the day shift. He could depend on her so absolutely, and there was something intuitive about her. She seemed to sense something about a patient's condition that other nurses missed.

Later that day, after the next nurse had relieved her, Glenda was having coffee in the hospital cafeteria, when another nurse, Olive Thomas, asked her, "How's the patient?"

"Holding her own, but I don't think the Chief is satisfied."

"Oh, tell him not to worry; she'll pull through," the other nurse said with a shrug. "God wouldn't let anything happen to Marianna Marshall."

"You shouldn't say things like that, Olive. It sounds sacrilegious."

"Oh, I was speaking from her viewpoint, honey. You know that girl's reputation?"

"She's my patient, Olive," Glenda warned.

"Oh, sure. Don't be touchy. And of course we all hope she gets back to normal. But facts are facts. I'm sure you know she feels a little superior to ordinary mortals like you and me. She and that guy she's engaged to, Stanley Webster—they're two of a kind. He's the first male patient I ever nursed who didn't try to date me. But I don't move in the same sphere, you know." Olive shrugged. "And who cares?"

Glenda said, "I've known him a long time, and he *did* ask me for a date. He's very friendly. But after all, he's engaged to the Marshall girl now— Hello, Bill." Her eyes went to Dr. Drake, who had just come to their table with a cup of coffee.

"The Chief says the Marshall girl was rational a while ago," Bill said.

"For a few moments; then she slipped back. I think she's asleep now; at least, she was when I left. What do you think of her, Bill?"

Bill grinned. "I think she's a honey—awake *or* asleep."

"I'm sure you do," Glenda said mildly, "but I was speaking professionally."

Dr. Drake stirred his coffee, laid the spoon aside, and then said carefully, in a more serious voice, "I'm not sure. It's her spine, of course."

"And her hip. Do you think she'll walk?"

"Oh sure, she'll be driving that white Cadillac around and riding that spirited horse in a couple of months or so."

"Are you really sure, Bill?" Glenda's voice was anxious.

"Sure I'm sure," Bill said lightly. "Fate wouldn't be unkind to Marianna."

"Olive just said something like that." Glenda sounded displeased.

"Well, you know what I mean. Seems the underdog always gets the worst end of things, while those who have, are taken care of."

"Not always. Of course in her case money's no object," Glenda said.

"That's what I mean. I think the Chief is calling in some outside doctors for consultation. Don't worry about it, she's going to be all right. I'll be asking her for a date before the month is out. Wait and see."

Olive said, "Little good it will do you."

"What's wrong with me?" Bill demanded, taking a piece of toast off her plate. "Women like me."

"Of course," Olive agreed, "but you're not a socialite." She got up from the table and flicked her fingers at them. "'Bye, now."

"Besides," Glenda said, when Olive was out of earshot, "she's engaged, you know."

"Well, I was joking, but I might as well."

"What do you mean?"

"Might as well take my interest elsewhere. I don't seem to get to first base with you. You can't see me, or any other man, for Philip Randall."

"Don't be absurd, Bill"—Glenda looked around—"and lower your voice when you say things like that."

"Why? Everyone knows it. And there's nothing absurd about it. You worship the guy. You practically swoon if he smiles at you. Why do all women feel that way about Philip Randall?"

"*All* women don't. I don't."

"Says you," Bill scoffed.

"Yes, says I," Glenda retorted.

"I've seen you watch him walk down the hall with your heart in your eyes. If you're not in love with him, you'd better take in your sign."

"That's ridiculous. I like to work with Dr. Randall. I *admire* him, but I'm not in love with him, and I hope you don't say a thing like that where he can get hold of it."

"If he weren't blind, he could see it for himself—and maybe he does. You hang on his words. You're in heaven when you're around him."

"Dr. Randall doesn't know *any* woman is living except as a patient. He's in love with his profession, and I'm *not* in

love with him, regardless of what you think. Why won't you believe me?"

"I don't have his brains," Bill said, "I'll never be the doctor he is, but I love you. I've told you that ninety-nine times."

Glenda got up and smoothed down her uniform. "Well, this isn't the time or the place to tell me again. And I *won't* have you thinking I'm in love with Dr. Randall, do you hear?"

"O.K., O.K., skip it. Date tonight?"

"I've promised to see Stanley Webster around seven. I think he wants to talk about Marianna Marshall."

"Well, blow me down," Bill said in disgust. "Here I wait for you to have a free night, and you hobnob with the guy with a Midas touch."

"Don't forget he's engaged to Miss Marshall."

"I hope you don't forget it," Bill retorted.

"I won't," Glenda said sweetly, "and I don't think he will, either."

A call came over the speaker: "Dr. Drake wanted in surgery. Dr. Drake wanted in surgery."

"Damn!" Bill said. "Can't even drink a cup of coffee in peace. And I haven't finished with you, my pet. We'll take this up later."

Glenda smiled and said, "Well, as I said, I'm seeing Stan Webster at seven, but I told him I would have only about thirty minutes to spare. I'll be free after that."

Bill grinned. "Why didn't you say so in the first place? I'll be there at eight, and that guy had better be gone." He went away whistling.

CHAPTER THREE

Days became weeks.

Marianna Marshall continued to lie white and still in her narrow hospital bed, her case puzzling the staff at Walker Memorial, as well as the other doctors who had been called in for consultation.

Marianna felt better, and she was cheerful most of the time. She could eat and drink anything she wanted and had been allowed company. Her uncle and aunt, Stanley Webster, and other friends were frequent visitors. The announcement of the postponement of her wedding had been made, but no one understood just why she could not leave the hospital.

The cast had been removed from her back; X-rays had been taken and retaken and studied closely; but the doctors could not understand why she could not use her left leg. The X-rays did not disclose the reason. There was an odd twist to her spine that surgery *might* help, but the majority of the doctors involved were against it.

Marianna was getting very impatient to go home. She was only occasionally in pain and felt stronger each day and was tired of hospital routine.

Dr. Randall came in one day and stood smiling down at her gravely. She looked up. She was conscious of missing a heartbeat when he smiled at her. It seemed a special smile, and he had been so wonderful to her all these weeks.

Before he spoke she said lightly, "When can I go home, Doctor?"

"Tired of us?"

"Of the hospital, yes."

"How do you feel?"

"That's just it, I feel fine. I see no reason for being in the hospital. I want to go home."

"No pain anywhere now?"

"Only when I try to get up. Glenda said that would go away. I suppose it's because my back is weak from being in the cast so long."

"Tried to walk today?"

Her eyes searched his face. "Miss Carlson—Glenda, said I shouldn't try again, not until you told me to. I suppose I'll have to learn how to walk again. I understand people have to do that who have been in bed a long time; but the sooner I try, the sooner I'll get back to normal."

He was silent so long, his face so grave, that Marianna said anxiously, "There isn't anything really wrong, is there, Doctor? I mean, no reason I can't walk?"

The doctor took a deep breath, hating his task, and said in the kindest voice he could command, "Miss Marshall, there is something I must tell you."

She looked at him, her eyes wide and searching and uneasy. Then she said quietly, "What do you mean?"

"I wanted your aunt—or—or Mr. Webster to take on the job, but they all seemed to feel that I could do it better."

"What are you talking about?"

He went on to tell her that because of some difficulty in her spine or hip, a difficulty the doctors did not understand, she would not have the proper use of her left leg.

"What sort of difficulty, Doctor?" Marianna gasped the question. "Don't beat about the bush. Whatever it is, I must know. Surely you don't mean that I'm not going to be able to walk again?"

He wished there were some other way to do this. The news he had to tell her would be bad for anyone, but especially for a beautiful girl who had always led an active life, who had never been ill.

In the pause she said accusingly, "You told me—all of you told me in the very beginning—that I would be all right. I believed you."

His eyes met hers, and he said gently, "I spoke from the best of my knowledge and belief. But sometimes complications occur. I still think that in time you will be as sound as ever, but for the present, Miss Marshall, you're not going to be able to use that leg. For some reason there is a paralysis."

"You're a fine lot of doctors!" Marianna's mouth curled scornfully. "I won't believe there's anything wrong with me that can't be cured by some doctor, somewhere. I'm going to expect you, or someone, to do something about it."

Dr. Randall smiled at her as he would have at an unreasonable child. "If there is anything at all that can be done, it will of course be done. We'll take additional X-rays from time to time. In the meantime, you should be able to walk with a crutch."

"*A crutch!*" Marianna said bitterly. "Well, I won't do it, and that's final."

"Well, that's up to you. You can go home any time you wish."

"Did you know that I'm to be married soon?"

"Yes, I had heard that. I see no reason you can't go ahead and get married if you wish."

Marianna laughed hysterically. "And walk down the aisle on a crutch?"

"Well, it might have been worse, you know. You have a lot to be thankful for. You're lucky that you still have your leg."

"Why? If I can't use it? Maybe I should be thankful that I wasn't killed, but frankly, if I can't walk, I would have preferred that."

Dr. Randall's voice became firm. "Saying things like that doesn't help. And remember, there is always hope. We're not giving up, but we want cooperation from you. If there *is* improvement, it's going to take time, and you can help a lot by your attitude. And you can still have a very happy life if you want it. It won't take you long to learn to get about with a crutch."

"I have no intention of trying," Marianna said stubbornly. "And I think I'm always going to hate you for letting me think in the beginning that I would be all right."

Marianna had been cheerful for days. The cast had been removed, and she had been feeling much better. She liked Glenda Carlson, and she liked Dr. Bill Drake, who had come in to see her several times each day. He was jolly and always had a joke or an amusing incident to tell about. Stan had come, too, and they talked about the wedding. Now Marianna wondered if they had all known that she would not walk again. If they had let her talk over her plans, knowing all the while those plans would not materialize. She now felt a strong resentment toward them all.

As the unbearable reality of her disability came over her, she shuddered, but she would not cry. And she would go home; it was pointless to stay in the hospital any longer. She would have Glenda Carlson go with her. She was used to Glenda now, and it would be better than facing this disaster alone. With someone around all the time she wouldn't have as much time to think. . . .

Feeling deep pity for Marianna, Dr. Randall permitted Glenda to go home with her. The nurse had such a hypnotic quality of cheerfulness, she could help ease the patient over her first hard days of adjustment.

"What a darling room!" Glenda exclaimed when she and her patient were settled in Marianna's old room and Marianna's aunt had left them together.

Deep carpets, soft lights, silken draperies, exquisite furniture, expensive paintings. It was the most luxurious bedroom Glenda had ever been in.

Marianna's eyes traveled listlessly around her. "A beautiful prison," she said bitterly, her eyes hard and bright. "I'm young, Glenda, I've my whole life before me, and I may live to be very old. It was going to be such a beautiful life, and now *this!*"

"You don't know that it will always be like this," Glenda said. "And it can still be beautiful. You can get plenty out of life, Marianna, if you just make up your mind to it. Walking with a crutch won't be so bad."

"I have no intention of finding out."

"But why? There's nothing humiliating about illness I've known cases like yours, Marianna, where people weren't expected to walk and did."

"You have?"

"Of course." Glenda was not quite truthful. She had never known a case just like Marianna's, and none of the doctors had. It had them all puzzled. But she wanted to offer what encouragement she could.

"I won't marry Stan now."

"I'm sure he wants you to."

"He *says* he does, but don't you think I have any pride? He would go ahead with it because he feels sorry for me. Stan is active; he plays golf, he rides, flies planes. Would he want to be tied to a woman in a wheel chair?"

"You'll get better as time goes by," Glenda said consolingly. "And I want you to begin trying the crutches."

"I won't," Marianna said again. "I won't have people feeling sorry for me, and that's all there is to it."

"I'm sure no one would think of it that way," Glenda said seriously. But she wasn't sure. Marianna had many friends, and despite her utter selfishness, many people loved her. Glenda recognized the magnetic charm about the girl—that is, about the gul as she had been before this calamity.

Would her friends stick? Were they the sort who would care as much for the Marianna in a wheel chair as they had for the Marianna who led the life of a social butterfly?

She said softly, "Marianna, think of your friends, think of Stan and your uncle and aunt. Forget yourself for a little while; this is for them, too. Don't you know it breaks their hearts to see you unhappy like this? If you'd just try to be cheerful, take an interest in things, it would help yourself, and them, too. Everybody has done all they can for you."

"Why should I pretend I'm not unhappy, that my life isn't over, when I have nothing to live for?"

"But you do have something to live for. You have people who love you. And there are so many things you can do. You can read; there's adventure and companionship in books. You can hear beautiful music. You can use your hands. I have a patient who hasn't used her hands or legs for years, who can do nothing at all for herself."

"That's too bad"—Marianna's voice was not sympathetic —"but it doesn't help me any. I'd rather be dead. I mean it. And I'll always hate Philip Randall because he told me I would be all right. I believed him. Maybe it wouldn't be so hard if I'd known from the very beginning that I won't walk again. He deceived me."

"No," Glenda argued, "he—none of us saw any reason why you wouldn't walk. We still don't. It's something no one understands. That's why we believe that eventually you will. But you're going to have to try, and to cooperate with us."

Dr. Bill Drake came by for Glenda late in the afternoon and went in to say hello to Marianna. He was cheerful and tried to joke with her, but Marianna was petulant and complained because he was taking Glenda away. Glenda was living at the Marshall home, and this was the first time she had been away except when Marianna was asleep. She promised she would not be gone long.

When they were driving away, Glenda said to Bill, "It isn't that she's so fond of me, not that at all. She's used to me and doesn't want to be alone with her dark thoughts."

"The Chief was complaining today, said he needs you. Does that make you happy?"

Not answering him directly, Glenda said, "Well, of course this arrangement is only temporary. I'll have to tell Mari-

anna soon that I can't continue staying with her. She'll throw a fit. I've been trying to think of somebody who would like the job. Steady employment at good pay, but it's not for me. I miss the hospital."

"*And* Dr. Randall."

"Have it your way," Glenda said indifferently, "but I'm really getting a bit fed up on that kind of talk, Bill."

Ignoring that, Bill said, "I think this case has him sort of licked. He doesn't understand it, and for that matter, no one does. I think he knows that she blames him, that she thinks in the very beginning he might have done something, or that maybe he did something wrong."

"She does feel that way, but it's ridiculous. She hates him, or says she does."

"I've never seen him so disturbed over a patient. He's really interested in her."

Glenda said, "You mean the case?"

"Of course, but I think he likes her, too. Remember that time we saw her riding in the park? He said something about her being too beautiful to be real and that Stanley Webster was a lucky guy."

"I don't think she'll marry Stan now."

"She say so?"

"Equivalent. And after all, Stan is a very active person. You could hardly blame him if he wanted to call it off. And she wouldn't like feeling that he was sorry for her and being gallant."

"But good grief, he was in love with her. She's the same person she was before the accident."

"Not exactly. Aside from the physical part, she's grown very bitter."

Bill said, "If you were in her place and I were in Stan's, I'd want to marry you and look after you all the rest of your life."

Glenda glanced at him and said softly, "Thank you, Bill. But no one really knows what he would do until placed in the same circumstances. And Stan *may* want to go ahead with it. I just said one could hardly blame him if he didn't."

That evening Stan and Barbara Wayne, who was to have been maid of honor in Marianna's wedding, came to see her. Marianna was in her chair, beautifully dressed as always, but with lines of bitterness around her mouth. Stan hadn't been

in earlier today, and she thought he might have come without Barbara. She suspected they were on their way to some social function.

"We had such a lovely ride in the park this afternoon," Barbara said gaily, and then added, "We missed you. I'm sure it won't be long until you'll be riding again."

"You know that isn't true," Marianna said flatly. "I do wish people wouldn't be constantly trying to save my feelings. I won't ride again ever, and everyone knows it."

"Of course you will," Stan said a bit uncomfortably. "Dr. Randall thinks so."

Marianna's mouth curled. "Why do you say that?"

"I talked to him yesterday, and he was very encouraging."

"Dr. Randall is a hypocrite," Marianna said. "They're all hypocrites—everyone who tells me I'll walk again."

Stan said, "Honey, you mustn't give up. You've got to keep up your courage."

Marianna's eyes were very bright. No one had seen her cry since she had known of her misfortune. She still had her pride. She said lightly, "Go on, have fun. Don't worry about me."

She didn't like the look that passed between Stan and Barbara. They were feeling sorry for her. For her, Marianna Marshall, who had always had everything. She decided that the next time she saw Stan alone she would make him take back his ring. Until now he had ridiculed the idea of canceling their wedding plans, but she was certain he was being chivalrous, and she wouldn't have it. Barbara had always liked Stan, and it was obvious she wasn't losing any time trying to capture his interest. If Marianna were out of the picture, Barbara would have a clear field. And why not? Barbara could go dancing with Stan, ride horseback; she could be a real wife. Stan had always liked Barbara, too.

Marianna went to sleep with her decision made: Stanley Webster would have his ring back before another twenty-four hours had passed.

CHAPTER FOUR

The days went by bleakly, and as Marianna had anticipated, her friends came to see her less often. Other things absorbed them, and then too, Marianna was no longer cordial. She had always been popular—the center of social activity—but her popularity had had roots in family and wealth; Marianna herself had been considered a snob by many who knew her. Now she showed no real interest in the activities of her old crowd, and bitterness seasoned all of her conversation. If she couldn't be a member of some riding party, or attend some brilliant dance, she didn't want to hear about it. Word had got around that Marianna did not welcome visitors, and so her friends came less often.

So far she had not agreed to any of her aunt's and uncle's suggestions for her future—to travel, to stay at a resort hotel, or a hospital somewhere else, or to take up her former life on a limited basis. None of this appealed to her. She was proud in her misfortune, and those around her soon learned that she wanted it ignored as much as possible.

Glenda was not staying with her now; Dr. Randall needed his nurse too much. But she came to visit often, sometimes bringing Bill Drake with her. Glenda and Bill were the only people Marianna wanted to see.

She would not consent to a nurse-companion to take Glenda's place. Glenda had said she knew of several who might consider the job, but the idea of paying someone to be nice to her was irksome to Marianna. She preferred to be alone.

Stan had taken his ring back, not too protestingly. He had demurred at first, saying they could let it rock along for a while, but he did not suggest again that they go ahead with the wedding plans. Of course, she would not have done it, but she did wish he had suggested it, and when he accepted the ring, Marianna felt a further shrinking of spirit. She almost wished she had married him a year ago. Then, at least, she would not have to worry about her future; she would have been the young Mrs. Stanley Webster. But she admitted to herself that she hadn't loved him, and that it was her pride

that was hurt more than her heart. Her foremost emotion was anger and rebellion. She had never known mental suffering before.

Dr. Randall had come to see her professionally several times. He could not conscientiously offer encouragement because hers was such a strange, baffling case, but he wanted to continue to observe and examine her. He maintained that time was a factor, and he still believed that eventually she would be able to walk again, but he dared not give her too much hope.

Marianna did not want to see him. She still thought him the most attractive man she had ever met, and it humiliated her for him to see her now, a cripple. She shrank from the word as though it were something disgraceful. "It's a misfortune," her aunt had said, "but certainly not a disgrace. And it could have happened to anyone. Just so a person's mind and character are not crippled—that is worse than bodily injury." To which Marianna had replied rudely, "Piffle! You know me well enough to know that sort of talk doesn't mean anything to me. I'm just what I am, and if it's my fate to be crippled, I'll—I'll endure it, but I won't be noble and hypocritical about it."

Marianna wished she might have met Dr. Phillip Randall under other circumstances. Glenda had told her what he had said about her that day they were riding in the park, and she was wholly sure that if she had met him then, she could have interested him. She remembered how he had looked directly into her eyes as though to say that someday they would meet again. . . .

October, in all its glory, had come and gone. It had always been Marianna's favorite month, but this year it had slipped away almost unnoticed.

Now, as she sat in her chair at the window, she looked out into a cold, gray November rain. Trees were bare, and raindrops clung to their branches, heralding colder weather. Flowers—great yellow, white and orchid chrysanthemums—hung their heads, weighted with water. The ground was carpeted with brown leaves. The whole world presented a dreary appearance.

Just like my life, Marianna thought, but her aunt's voice broke into her introspection. "Dr. Randall is here to see you, darling." She snapped on a light, dispelling some of the gloom in the room.

"Rather dreary out there," Dr. Randall said in the breezy,

husky voice that usually brought cheer into a patient's room. "Makes this room with the open fire and rosy lights seem all the more cozy. How do you feel today, Marianna?"

Marianna shrugged, not meeting his eyes. "What is it they always say at the hospitals—'as good as can be expected'? That's the way I feel, I suppose. And you needn't ask every time you come. I felt that way yesterday, I feel that way today, and I'll feel that way tomorrow."

Dr. Randall smiled. "But that's one of the things we don't know, isn't it? I mean, how we will feel tomorrow. Glenda tells me you're getting about some with the crutch. That's good."

"What's good about it?" Marianna snapped the question.

Unperturbed, the doctor said, "Well, for one thing, it keeps you from sitting in that chair all the time."

"I hate it, Dr. Randall," Marianna exclaimed, her eyes very bright. "There's something humiliating about it."

"You must not feel that way," the doctor said seriously. "There's nothing humiliating about illness. It's just something we must accept, and the better we accept it, the more we get out of life."

"Talk!" Marianna exclaimed. "People can talk that way who have had no experience with misfortune."

"But one must have courage and determination to live above one's misfortune."

"How?"

There was a moment of silence; then the doctor said, "The first thing is will—the will to get something out of life. You must laugh at defeat and have courage to go on. And you must have hope. I want you to continue to use that crutch. I think motion will help you. You'll never be any better if you sit all the time, or lie down."

"I definitely will not go out anywhere. I do walk about the house a little. I don't think it will do any good though, and I don't want to come to the hospital any more for the massage and other treatment. I'm sure that is pointless, too."

"I think it helps. I want you to think so, too. And if you won't go out to please yourself, will you do it to please me?"

"How do you mean?" Marianna's surprised eyes met his.

"Would you go for a short ride with me?"

"That's ridiculous. Of course not. Isn't that carrying professional interest a little too far? You don't have to ask me to go out with you, you know."

"No, I don't have to, but I happen to want to."

How she would have reveled in such an offer a few weeks ago! Dr. Philip Randall, the handsome sought-after doctor, escorting Marianna Marshall. She could imagine the comments. But why would he ask her now, unless he was motivated by pity?

Raising her eyes to his, she asked him candidly, "Why do you happen to want to, Doctor?"

"Various reasons," the doctor said pleasantly, "but the fact remains that I do."

Her aunt said, "I wish you would go, darling; I think it would help you."

"Nothing will help me," Marianna said forlornly, dejectedly, for once forgetting her arrogance.

"Nothing will unless you let it," Dr. Randall said somewhat briskly. "I think you should change your attitude." To her aunt he said authoritatively, "Will you have the maid get her a coat? It's almost lunchtime. We can stop somewhere and eat."

"No," Marianna exclaimed protestingly, "I couldn't possibly do that."

"Oh yes," Philip Randall said, "you can. If you don't want to go where you might see some of your friends, I know a quiet place not far in the country where we can go. It's going to help you to get out more. You'll find after a few times you won't mind at all. Mixing with people is going to help you, too."

"You both keep talking of helping me. Help me to do what? Live with my affliction?" Marianna's voice sounded scornful. "I'll exist with it, Doctor, but I'll never live with it. And if your asking me out is part of the treatment, you can forget it."

Surprisingly, he said, "Don't be contrary, Marianna. Will it change your attitude any if I tell you that weeks ago I intended doing this very thing? You may ask Glenda Carlson if you don't believe me. I've wanted to ask you for a long time—I told her so that day I saw you riding in the park. I knew then I wanted to know you. Now will you go?"

Looking at him standing there smiling down at her, Marianna felt a faint quiver of excitement.

"I would have enjoyed going—then," she admitted with a half-smile. And from the safety of an invalid's chair, not caring what he would think, she added, "I told Stan that same morning I wanted to meet you, too, and Stan didn't like it."

"I can well imagine that."

They laughed together, the first time the doctor had seen Marianna laugh since she had known she could not walk. After her weeks of confinement and dreariness, the prospect of going somewhere with an attractive man *was* inviting. And too, it was hard to resist Philip Randall's friendliness and persuasive personality.

Mary Marshall was back with Marianna's luxurious fur coat and a bright scarf and gloves. "It's such a blustery day," she said, "but I'm sure even so it will do her good to get out."

"The car will be warm." He took the coat. "Just stand a moment; you can hold to the chair while we slip it on."

Marianna had not decided that she would go, but she found herself doing his bidding. So far, she had used the crutch just to get about the room and never when anyone was around, but when he picked it up and handed it to her, she took it without comment.

The room she was in had French doors opening onto a terrace bordered by the driveway. The doctor had thought it all out. In a matter-of-fact voice he said, "I'll drive the car around. It has stopped raining, and your aunt can roll your chair to the edge of the driveway. I don't believe you'll need the crutch to get to the car, but we'll take it along." And then he was gone, ignoring the fact that she had never really said she would go.

Marianna watched him from the window. His dark head was bare, the collar of his big camel's-hair coat was turned up, and he was putting on his gloves. How wonderful it would be if she could go out on a date with this man as she used to be. To her aunt she said, "It's nice of Dr. Randall to ask me to go out with him, but what I don't like about it"—she paused, took a deep breath—"I'm sure he's just being nice to his patient—as part of the treatment."

"Don't feel that way," her aunt urged. "He didn't have to do it, you know. I'm so glad you decided to go. I'm sure you're going to enjoy it, and it won't be so hard the next time."

"If there *is* a next time. I don't want people looking at me, feeling sorry for me."

Mary Marshall rolled the chair to the drive just as Dr. Randall stopped his big car. He got out and came around to open the door for Marianna. Without waiting for her to attempt to get out of the chair, he picked her up easily in

his arms and placed her gently on the front seat, leaning the crutch beside her.

"That wasn't bad, was it?" He smiled, and Marianna said lightly, "I'm a hundred and fifteen pounds."

"And I'm a hundred and ninety," the doctor told her, grinning. "Here, let me close the door before you freeze." To her aunt he said, "I'll bring her back safely in a couple of hours or so."

Dr. Randall maneuvered the big car expertly through traffic, and they were soon on the smooth ribbon of concrete outside the city. Brown fields stretched away on both sides of the road; cows stood huddled together close to the fences; bare branches of trees swayed in the wind. A rabbit scurried across the road, and the doctor's foot pressed on the brake. "Never saw any use in killing the small creatures," he remarked. "A half-second sometimes is all that's needed to give them a chance to live, and it's too bad that people don't give them even that."

Another indication of his kindness, Marianna thought. She had heard many good things about him long before she had ever met him. People said that he was a great humanitarian as well as a great surgeon, that he took a deep personal interest in all his cases. This drive today was of course a part of his kindness. But being young and a woman, she was enjoying his company. She snuggled down in the warmth of the big car, and asked, "Where did you say we were going?"

The doctor's arm shot out, and he glanced at the watch on his wrist. "It's almost twelve; they start serving about now. We're going to the Woodside Inn. You may not have ever been there. It isn't at all fashionable, just homey, with an old-fashioned atmosphere It's a converted farmhouse. But the food is delicious. I thought you might like to go there. It's very quiet, and I'm sure there won't be many guests."

He talked easily and carelessly of many things, but nothing regarding hospitals or sickness crept into the conversation. He drew her out about her travels, and they found they had both been in Majorca and had loved it. For a brief time Marianna forgot her condition and was her old, vivacious self, much to his surprise and delight.

When they arrived at the dining room, the doctor drove around to the side of the building by a paved patio. There were only a few steps to the side door. She made them with little effort but stopped just inside the room to rest.

It was a large room with tables lined against the walls. It was rustic, with beamed ceiling and square supporting posts set at intervals. It was pleasant and attractive, with a big fireplace at one end in which huge logs blazed, casting a soft mellow light over the room. Candles were on all the tables. There were few diners.

"This is pleasant," the doctor said when they were seated, his eyes moving over the room. "Well, now that you've made the break, maybe you'll go back to your old way of living and go out with some of your friends. There's no reason you shouldn't."

That's why he asked me, Marianna thought resentfully. *The only reason.* It was part of the treatment. She said, "But I don't want to go back. Not as I am now." She hesitated a moment, then added, "You see, I can't dance or take part in any of their social activities." She put her left hand on the table. "You see my ring is gone."

The doctor glanced at her hand, raised his eyes to hers. "What does that mean?"

"It's obvious, isn't it? I'm not engaged to Stanley Webster any more."

"How did that happen?"

"I suppose you mean which of us did it? I did, of course."

"And he let you? Let you get away from him?"

"Thank you. That sounds like a compliment whether you mean it that way or not."

"I never say things I don't mean." His eyes held hers.

"I did it," she said, "but Stan was willing." She laughed. "He protested at first, but I'm sure in the end his feeling was one of great relief."

"I understood that he was very much in love with you."

"Past tense. Oh, I don't blame him. Stan's a very active person, and I realize life would be dull for him with a—a crippled wife—an *incurably* crippled wife."

The doctor knew it was hard for this imperious, arrogant girl to face the facts. She had said once that he didn't know what sort of girl she was. He knew more than she thought. He knew she was shallow, selfish, spoiled, and immature. But something told him this was but the outer covering. He felt that deep under the surface there was something fine. Whether it would ever come to the surface was something else. It would have to be developed. And to develop it might take suffering and pain, disappointment and loneliness.

He said gently, "We don't know that it is incurable; there have been many medical miracles, and we don't give up hope."

"I do."

"But you shouldn't."

"You know it's said 'To doubt is worse than to despair,' and if I have no hope at all, then I won't have any more disappointment."

He opened his menu, and mentioned that a specialty of the house was pheasant and wild rice. She told him to order whatever he liked, that she wasn't hungry but she did like pheasant.

After the waiter had taken the order and gone, the doctor said, "It's none of my business, of course, and I shouldn't ask, but I'd like to know. How do you feel about Stan now?"

"My heart isn't broken," Marianna said proudly, "if that's what you mean. Not about Stan, it isn't. But I do have—I suppose it's pride. Any girl would hope that the man she is engaged to loves her enough to stand by her— Oh, I'm not blaming him, as I said before, because I've asked myself what I would do if the situation had been reversed and if Stan had been the one to be hurt. And I had my answer. I'm too selfish to tie myself to someone who could not ride and dance and play golf and tennis. I know that *my* love would not have stood the test." She shrugged. "Would yours?"

"If I loved a girl very much—enough to marry her, I think it would, but I realize that people are different. In fact, I believe it would make me love her more."

"Now you're talking about pity."

"Not at all. I would love her all the more because of her misfortune—and try to make up to her for it. Doesn't Stan come around any more?"

"Oh yes, we're friends, but none of the crowd come as often as they did at first. Aunt Mary says I drove them away, that I showed them I would rather be alone."

"And would you?"

"Most of the time, yes. I'm out of touch with things now, and it just makes me unhappy to have them talking about what they are doing, where they are going. I enjoy Glenda's visits and Dr. Bill Drake's. But you see, the difference is they didn't know me before. I wish Glenda could stay with me all the time. She's the only one I want—and you can't spare her?"

"No." The answer was very definite. Then he added,

"Glenda is too valuable a person not to be in a hospital."

"And much too valuable to be wasted on an invalid," Marianna said. "I realize that."

"I didn't mean that. I meant there are many other nurses qualified as nurse-companions who could not fill Miss Carlson's place at the hospital." And realizing they were back to the same subject, he skillfully changed it again.

But Marianna was thinking about Glenda. She wondered if Philip Randall was in love with Glenda. There was a special quality in his voice when he mentioned her name. Or perhaps she just imagined it.

"They're hunting someone to stay with me," she said presently. "Glenda said she was sure she could find someone, and Aunt Mary has interviewed several, but I don't want anyone else. My maid can do the necessary things for me, and I don't want anyone around as a companion."

"You can't spend all your days shut up in that house, seeing no one. You'll get morbid. A nurse-companion would be good in that respect, could see that you get out, drive you in your car, take you shopping. Life isn't going to stop for you, you know, and it's up to you whether it will be full and happy or empty and lonely."

Marianna's answer to that was a shrug; she had heard it all before. Her eyes moved restlessly about her. She saw no one she knew. The doctor had spoken to several people, but they were all strangers to her.

There was soft music filling the room, firelight flickered on the ceiling, and the food was delicious. Marianna realized she was enjoying herself. She might have been agreeable to repeating the experience with Dr. Randall if she had the chance had it not been for a conversation she overheard in the powder room between two girls. The room was not far from her table, and she had limped her way there and sat down at one of the small dressing tables. There were two small rooms separated by a sliding partition that did not go all the way to the ceiling.

She became aware of voices and sat quite still on hearing her name.

"How does it happen he's dating Marianna Marshall?"

"He's probably not dating her. He's her doctor, and they say he does things like that, that he always has a very personal interest in his patients. You know he could have any woman he wanted, and I doubt he'd be seriously interested in a girl who will always be crippled. It's probably his kind

heart. When my nephew broke his collarbone, Dr. Randall was wonderful to him, brought him toys and took him to the circus. He just does things like that. Isn't he the handsomest—" A door opened and closed. The girls were gone, without discovering that Marianna had been listening on the other side of the partition.

Marianna felt herself trembling. Of course she shouldn't have ever come out with Dr. Randall. He was taking her to a circus, was he? Or the equivalent. He was taking her out because he was sorry for her, because it was his way of doing things. That's what people thought when they saw her with him. Well, they wouldn't have a chance to see her with him again, even if he should ask her.

She was very quiet on the drive home, contributing nothing to the conversation. It puzzled the doctor, because she had been cheerful and animated on the way out. He said gently, "I hope this hasn't been too much for you. I'm afraid you're a little tired."

Marianna admitted that she was tired. She said nothing more.

When they stopped at her home and he had her safely inside again, he said, "I'll see you again soon, Marianna; you're my favorite patient, you know."

"Well, the grateful patient thanks you for the outing," Marianna said brittlely, "but don't take any more of your time to amuse me. I understand you bring some of your patients toys and take others to the circus. I'll get by without that sort of attention, but thanks, anyway."

He did not ask her what she meant. Perhaps she had heard that he did such things for his patients. She was weary now. He only extended his hand, held hers a long moment, and said, "Don't imagine things, Marianna. Don't look for hidden motives. Get all the rest you can and keep cheerful, and we'll do this again soon."

And then he was gone.

CHAPTER FIVE

Dr. Bill Drake said to Glenda Carlson when she was leaving the hospital that afternoon, "Did you know the Chief is taking Marianna Marshall out?"

Wheeling in surprise, Glenda said, "Taking her out? Out where? Marianna doesn't go anywhere."

"She went somewhere today. She went to lunch with Dr. Randall, believe it or not."

"All right, I *don't* believe it. Who told you anything so absurd?"

"Why don't you believe it? And what's absurd about it? It's true. I talked to a fellow who saw them at the Woodside. It's out in the country a little way."

"I know where it is. Maybe the person who told you doesn't know Marianna."

"Oh, he knows her, all right. That's what surprised him, seeing her there on crutches with Dr. Randall."

"I still find it hard to believe. You know how many times we've tried to get her to go out with us, and she wouldn't even consider it."

"Well, you know it's said that the Chief has hypnotic powers, especially where the ladies are concerned. Remember I told you I thought he was interested in that girl. Why are you so disturbed? Not jealous, are you?"

"Don't be ridiculous. If Marianna goes out, you know I'm very glad regardless of who takes her."

"But you don't like the idea of your god taking her?"

Glenda started to walk away, but he caught her arm, turned her around.

"Why won't you face facts, honey? You lavish enough affection on that job of yours to hold many marriages together, and it's sort of misplaced loyalty. I mean it's far beyond the call of duty." His eyes held hers, and he continued relentlessly. "Say what you will, I think it's partly because of Philip Randall— Oh, I know you like your job and all that, but you're taking it too far; it's become an obsession with you. You have a life apart from this hospital, or should have."

He paused and she asked coolly, "Is that all?"

"No. If you're not interested in him as a man, why do you try to keep all other females at a distance?"

"Women run after him, annoy him," Glenda said, her voice defensive. "You know they do. And it's part of my job to keep them from bothering him."

"I'm sure Marianna Marshall wasn't bothering him."

"Well, good heavens, I haven't tried to keep him away from Marianna. Why are we arguing about it, Bill? I don't have to explain my actions to you. I will say Dr. Randall is interested in Marianna's *case,* very *much* interested. I know that."

"He wouldn't let you stay on the case. And you were making darn good money there."

"I didn't spend years of training in surgery to be a nurse-companion for anybody at any salary. I have a profession. I like to work at it."

"Would you like your job just as much if Walker Memorial had another chief? If for some reason Dr. Randall should leave?"

"I'm tired, Bill. I'm going now. I've told you before, and I'm telling you again, if you keep talking like this, you needn't ask me for any more dates. I hope you remember it."

With that, Glenda walked away. As she headed across the grounds to her car she thought of Marianna sitting alone in her home, and she decided to stop by to see her on her way home.

Marianna was glad to see Glenda. After a few moments' conversation while the maid served them tea Glenda said, "I was so glad to learn that Dr. Randall took you to lunch today. I'm sure it made you feel much better after being shut in so long."

"Did he tell you?"

"No. Bill told me."

"How did Bill know?"

"Someone who saw you at the restaurant told him."

Marianna could not keep the resentment from her voice when she said, "Why should it cause any comment? Why should anyone think it important enough to tell?"

Surprised at Marianna's tone, Glenda said generously, "Well, you know you've always been news, Marianna."

"Why don't you just admit that it was so unusual for Dr. Randall to be seen out lunching during the day with a girl, and especially one who is crippled, that it caused comment?"

Not realizing she was saying the wrong thing, Glenda said, "People are never surprised at anything Philip Randall does. To him his patients are people, not cases. He's always interested in them."

"Well, as his nurse you can tell him this," Marianna said. "You can tell him that he needn't bother to be nice to this particular patient. After all, I *am* a case, and it would be just as well for him to dismiss this particular case. He's done all he can. He can forget the psychological part of the treatment."

"I'm sorry you feel that way. Didn't you enjoy the day?"

Marianna said only, "I won't go again, so he needn't suggest it." And then she said, "Don't mind my asking, Glenda, but is Dr. Randall in love with you?"

"Indeed he isn't," Glenda said promptly. "To him I'm just an efficient machine. What gave you such an idea?"

"Oh, I don't know. Things Bill has said and then—the way he said your name, the way he looked when he was talking about you."

"That's your imagination. I think he misses me when I'm away, yes. And he's lost without me. I'm his right hand, but I assure you it's strictly professional—on both sides."

"Bill doesn't think so."

"Bill is crazy."

"He's in love with you."

Glenda sighed. She regretted the conversation had taken such a personal turn. "I like Bill," she said, "when he doesn't irritate me and imagine all sorts of things. He does irritate me when he talks about Philip Randall and how I feel about him."

"I suppose that goes for me, too. I'm sorry."

"Oh, I don't mean that, Marianna," Glenda said quickly. "But after all, this conversation is a bit silly. Let's talk of something else. I will add this, though. If Dr. Randall should ask you to go out again, I wish you would."

"No," Marianna said a little harshly, "I won't." And then she changed the subject. "You couldn't possibly make arrangements to go away with me for just a little while?"

It was hard for Glenda to resist the appeal in Marianna's voice, but she said gently, "No, Marianna. I'm sorry. But I'm needed at the hospital. I can't stay away. I do wish, though, that you would let me find someone for you. I know several girls I think you'd like."

But Marianna only shook her head. She wasn't interested in anyone else; she did not want a stranger around.

When Glenda went away, Marianna sat for a long time looking out into the gray, wintry dusk. It was dreary and desolate. She did not turn on a light, but sat in shadow, forlorn and unhappy. She could not get Philip Randall off her mind. He had been so kind and considerate, but she did not want kindness and consideration from any man; she wanted admiration. And she simply would not sit here and stagnate, seeing her friends having a good time, leading normal lives. If she had merely to exist, she would go elsewhere.

She would never know why she happened to think of her Uncle Bruce Livingston. She had not seen him for a long time. He was an eminent scientist—a doctor of philosophy, an entomologist, and a naturalist. He had taught at a university, and he had written many books. He was considered somewhat eccentric, something of a hermit. Some years ago he had retired to a lonely farm on top of a hill, a place he called "Hilltop." Marianna had been there once when she was ten years old. He had married when quite young, and after the death of his wife he had gone to Hilltop, where he now stayed in seclusion most of the time, doing his writing and making his experiments. She remembered that there was a couple there who looked after him, and she remembered that Hilltop was the loneliest place she had ever been.

She had not thought of him for a long time, although occasionally she did read articles about him in the papers. She did not hear from him often, only at Christmastime, and sometimes he remembered her birthdays. Why did he come to her mind now? And what would it be like to go there—to go to Hilltop and stay with him for a while? She would be completely out of things, no one asking questions or giving advice. She would be forgotten. She could get away from humiliation and pity.

Her aunt disturbed her introspection. "Why are you sitting here in the dark, Marianna?" She went around snapping on lights.

"Sit down, Aunt Mary, I want to talk to you." There was a strange forcefulness in her voice.

When her aunt was seated, Marianna said, "How long since you've heard from Uncle Bruce?"

"He was here right after your accident—I must have forgotten to tell you in all the excitement. He had heard about

the wreck and came down to see about you and telephoned after that. I promised to write him, but I've just never been able to get around to it. And Bruce is so absent-minded, you know; he's probably forgotten whether I wrote or not. How did you happen to think of him?"

"I don't know. I wonder myself. I suppose he still lives up there on top of that mountain?"

"It isn't really a mountain, but it does seem like one. And it's certainly a very remote place."

"He's somewhat eccentric, isn't he?"

"Some people say so. He's a very fine person, Marianna, educated, really brilliant, and people often say things like that about brilliant people. He does have some peculiar ways though, such as not wanting a telephone—says he doesn't want people breaking into his thoughts and disturbing him. I don't suppose many people go there; it's way off the highway, you know, on a road that winds and winds until it reaches the top of the hill. Don't you remember going there when you were a child?"

"Of course. I was ten years old. He doesn't always stay there, does he?"

"I understand he travels—or used to—giving lectures. Otherwise, I think he stays there most of the time. I've invited him down here many times, but he never comes."

"Anti-social?"

"I don't think it's that exactly. Your Uncle Jack says he just lives in another world." And again she asked, "What started you thinking about him?"

For answer Marianna said slowly, musingly, "Do you suppose that he would let me come up and stay with him for a while?"

Mary Marshall looked completely astonished. "That's a ridiculous idea, Marianna."

"Why?"

"You would die of boredom. There's no one there except the Fowlers—Jim and Martha Fowler—who run the place and look after him. Martha told me once that sometimes days pass when Bruce hardly speaks to anyone. Days when he's busy with his writing or his experiments. The place has been improved since you saw it, but it's a long way from being what you're accustomed to. No, Marianna, it's out of the question for you to go there, even for a short visit."

"Is there any way to get in touch with him other than by letter?"

"By letter, or to go there. It's only about sixty miles from here, you know. Surely you're not thinking seriously of such a venture."

"I think I am, Aunt Mary. Something seems to have happened to me inside. I don't want to be on the fringe of things. I'm a different person now, and I may as well make a new life for myself if I can. I'd like to go where no one would find me."

"But *why* do you want to go where no one will find you?" Her aunt was genuinely puzzled. "You're going to be all right, darling; why not just go ahead as you always have done, living your life normally, seeing your friends and going out whenever you can? There's no use to—to *hide*. It simply doesn't make sense."

"Please let me work it out my own way, Aunt Mary."

"But there are so many interesting places you can go, if that's what you want. We've offered to take you anywhere you want."

"I wish I could make you understand. I don't *want* to go to the sort of place you would take me; I want to get off by myself for a while; I want to—yes, *hide* away for a while. I'm going to ask Uncle Bruce if I may come up there for a while, and I don't want you to tell anyone where I am." She paused, then said in a voice that was wholly unlike the old Marianna, "Aunt Mary, I feel lost, and I want to find myself. Please don't put any obstacles in my way; just let me do what I want to this time. It's not far away; I can come back any time I like."

"Your Uncle Jack isn't going to like it. And in fact, I'm not sure that Bruce Livingston would want his privacy disturbed."

"I'm going to write him and find out. I'll write him tonight."

Marianna did not have to write her letter because, coincidentally, her uncle came to visit her that night. He said he had heard nothing about her condition for some time and so decided he would come down and find out for himself. He was very much surprised and distressed to see Marianna in her wheel chair and to note the crutches. He always thought of her as so vitally alive. He had been fond of her when she was a little girl and wished he had known her better as the years went by, but other things had got in the way. It hurt him now very much to see her as she was since her accident.

Marianna did not remember him so clearly. This handsome, distinguished, well-built man with the salt-and-pepper hair did not look like he had when she was a little girl, or so it seemed. He reminded her a little of Philip Randall.

They had talked only a little while when she said, "Uncle Bruce, I was wondering this afternoon if you would let me come up and stay with you for a while."

"My dear child!" Bruce Livingston exclaimed, astonished. "Nothing in the world would please me more, but I'm afraid that would be entirely out of the question."

"Why?"

"Many reasons. In the first place, you wouldn't stay if you went. It's a bleak, lonely place. And I'm a very uncongenial person; much of my time is spent in writing and in experiments. There's no one else there at all except the Fowlers. Our nearest neighbor, Camellia Trent, is a mile away, and she probably wouldn't be congenial; she's older —somewhere in the thirties. Oh no, I couldn't let you in for anything like that, my dear."

Marianna looked up at him, her eyes very bright and appealing.

"Please, Uncle Bruce. I wouldn't mind the loneliness, and seclusion is what I want, for a while, anyway. I want to be away from people I know."

He thought he understood her mood. She felt lost and unhappy because of the change in her life, and while he would like to grant her request, he really doubted the wisdom of it. And then he had another thought. Perhaps a little solitude might be good for her, might enable her to make some plans for her future.

They talked it over at length at dinner, her Aunt Mary and Uncle Jack trying to impress her with the disadvantages, but nothing they could say would change Marianna's mind, and finally Bruce Livingston said she could come and try it and that she could leave any time she had had enough.

He said he had to go back that night; they could not induce him to stay. He would go and tell Martha to make preparations for Marianna; Mary and Jack Marshall could drive her up sometime tomorrow.

CHAPTER SIX

Hilltop farms spread across a wide plateau on the top of a high hill. The view was breath-taking from all sides, ending in a far-away blue haze, and a small, shimmering lake could be seen down in the valley The hillsides were covered with pines, oaks, and beechtrees, and in the springtime were a riot of color with the dogwood and mountain laurel. It was a little startling to drive over the winding graveled road from the highway and suddenly come upon a well-kept farm and orchards. There were silvered old barns and sheds, chicken runs, a great silo, and a windmill. There were pasture lands for cattle, horses and sheep. Jim Fowler was a good farmer and made Hilltop a profitable enterprise. Bruce Livingston trusted him completely and rarely took part in the management of the farm, for he knew little about it. There was a hired man, Joe Young, who did much of the heavy work and looked after the animals. All the equipment was modern; the cows and sheep were the finest; and the fruit produced was the best that could be bought.

But the house itself was not attractive. It was a big four-square frame house painted gray, with white trim. There was a long porch running across the front of the house, a prolific flower garden at the side. The rooms were large, with high ceilings, and all had fireplaces. Some of the rooms were equipped with stoves that were kept burning during the coldest weather. Dr. Livingston was always comfortable, and the absence of central heating did not bother him.

The furniture was old-fashioned and massive; the carpets and draperies were good but well-worn. Dr. Livingston was so engrossed in his work that he paid little attention to anything else. He would have been amenable to anything either Martha or Jim Fowler wanted to buy, but they seemed satisfied with the place as it stood. They cared little for changes.

During the day Dr. Livingston kept mostly to the two rooms that he called his studio, stopping sometimes for a light lunch of soup or sandwiches. Other times Martha brought the food to him and he continued working. Late

in the afternoon, regardless of the weather, he took a long walk, coming in just before the evening meal was served. After dinner he might work again for a while or read the papers, or perhaps join Martha and Jim Fowler in looking at television when there might be something that appealed to him, or for the news. Life ran smoothly at Hilltop, and Bruce Livingston was content.

Martha was still up when he returned from the city, and he told her about Marianna. Martha was startled. They rarely had company—never any to stay very long. She remembered Marianna as a spoiled child and couldn't understand why the girl would want to come to Hilltop, having always understood that she was a social butterfly, very popular and admired. But she told Dr. Livingston she would help in any way she could.

Martha Fowler got up early the next morning in order to have things in readiness before Marianna arrived. She decided on the big downstairs bedroom for the guest; it was the choice room in the house, and Marianna would not want to go up and down stairs. The room faced south and had many windows, and the view was lovely. There was a big white canopied bed, white rag rugs on the floors, and the woodwork was white. The huge fireplace burned logs. Adjoining the room was a large bathroom with an electric heater; this would do nicely for dressing.

Work vanished under Martha's capable hands, and when she had finished with the room, she went to the kitchen She would make up a soup for lunch, toast some muffins, and then give thought to what they would have for dinner tonight. She could bake a hen with dressing, make a mincemeat or pumpkin pie. They were always good in cold weather, and the air certainly tasted like snow. Martha realized she was beginning to feel excitement at the prospect of Marianna's visit. It would be nice to have another woman in the house for a change.

Marianna's uncle and aunt drove her to Hilltop. The day was bleak and gray and seemed to grow perceptibly colder the farther they got up the hill. Mary Marshall said anxiously, "I still think you shouldn't come up here this time of year. I've brought your electric blanket and heating pad, but as I remember that farmhouse, you simply can't keep warm in it."

"It doesn't matter," Marianna said, sounding forlorn. "If

I'm to be a different person, everything might as well be different. I can find out just what I'm really like."

"But it's all so unnecessary," her aunt pointed out, to which Marianna made no comment.

Her uncle said, "Well, if it doesn't work out, if you're too lonely, have Bruce bring you down or write us and we'll send for you. I give you less than a month. Personally, I couldn't last half that long. I've never liked the country; give me the bright lights every time."

Clouds hung low and heavy, and winds were bending the bare branches of the trees. They reached the farmhouse in the early part of the afternoon, but because of the dreariness of the gray day it looked almost like twilight.

Dr. Livingston met them at the door. "Come in," he greeted, his voice friendly and welcoming. "I'm so glad you're here. It looks very much like snow. I'm sure you expect to spend the night?" His eyes went to Mary Marshall, who said quickly, "Oh no, we must get back right away. It doesn't take long, and we can get home before night." Jack Marshall added that they couldn't possibly stay; they had plans for the evening.

They would not even stay for dinner, although Martha assured them it was practically ready, so she served them a cup of coffee and broken squares of hot and fragrant gingerbread, with sweet country butter just churned. The guests said they had never eaten anything more appetizing.

Marianna's eyes moved around the big living room with the huge fireplace alight with brightly burning pine logs. A sudden forlornness enveloped her at the strangeness of it all, and she found little to say. She was tired and sank gratefully in the depths of the big soft-cushioned chair.

"I remember you," Martha said pleasantly. "You have the same beautiful skin color you had as a little girl." She urged her to try the gingerbread, but Marianna would take only the coffee.

Dr. Livingston's collie, Jock, came in, stopped a moment by his master's chair, and then came and stood before Marianna, switching his big plumy tail.

"He wants to welcome you," her uncle said. "He's a privileged character around here. If he annoys you, just send him about his business. He'll go, he's very polite."

Marianna looked at the big dog but said nothing. She had never had a dog, and she did not understand them. Jock sat down in front of her and extended one white paw.

"He wants to shake hands with you," Martha said as the collie again extended his paw.

Marianna drew back. "I—I'm not used to animals. Go away."

Dr. Livingston spoke to the collie, and the dog came to him immediately and sat, watching Marianna with puzzled eyes. As if to make up for Marianna's treatment of him, Jack Marshall walked over to the dog and extended his hand. "Hi, fellow! Why didn't you come and speak to me?" The dog immediately responded with a happy wriggle. To Marianna her uncle said mildly, "You should make friends with him; he'll be company for you." Marianna made no comment.

Mary and Jack Marshall stayed about an hour, and after they had gone, Uncle Bruce talked pleasantly of his work, of the farm, and of his few neighbors, mentioning again Camellia Trent. He spoke highly of her; she was a wonderful person, he said. She helped him in his work, typing manuscripts for him, and he hoped she would come over soon. He said there were horses at Hilltop, mainly palominos, and then remembering that Marianna could not ride now, he switched the conversation to his fine herd of cattle, his sheep and other animals. He asked Marianna if she played chess, which she did not, and he said he would teach her. Martha and Jim both played, and they often had a game after dinner. Did she play bridge? Marianna nodded. "Well, that's fine," he said. "We can all play some evenings." There was, of course, very little to do in the country at night.

She said frankly, "Uncle Bruce, please don't try to entertain me. I didn't come up here for that."

"But, child, you'll have to do *something* with your time. You can't just sit and look at the four walls and the fire."

"Don't worry about it, I'll get along. Of course if you should want me to play, I'll be glad to, but it doesn't matter to me one way or the other."

"Well, there's a piano over there, although it's probably out of tune. You can try it, and if you like, I'll have someone come up from the village and tune it." Marianna said not to bother, that she probably would not care about playing.

Night descended swiftly, and it had been dark for some time when they sat down to dinner, the Fowlers, Dr. Livingston, and Marianna. The big dog lay on the hearth. He had not again approached Marianna; he seemed to be waiting to be invited.

Marianna liked the Fowlers. They were plain, pleasant people. Jim was quite talkative, telling about a new colt, twin calves that were born that day, and a litter of new kittens at the barn. Marianna could not ignore his friendliness. She listened to him with interest, realizing that he was exerting himself to entertain her. She had never had a kitten, she told him, had never had a pet of any kind, and she would come down to the barn tomorrow and see them.

The four of them played cards for an hour, and although at first Marianna played without interest, all were good players, and she soon found herself putting forth some effort. She and Jim Fowler won two games out of three, and then Martha said Marianna was probably tired and ready for bed.

She went with Marianna to the bedroom, bustled about, poking up the fire until a million sparks burst forth. She unpacked Marianna's clothes and hung them in the big walk-in closet, put blouses and other things away in drawers of the huge antique dresser. She turned down the bed and adjusted the pillows, turning off the light in the center of the room and snapping on a rosy bedside light, meanwhile talking at random, ignoring the fact that Marianna had little to say.

"Shall I bring you up some hot milk a little later after you're in bed? I find it sometimes helps me to get to sleep."

Marianna said she was sure she would go to sleep without it.

"Now, don't get up in the morning until I come in and get your fire going good," Martha admonished her on leaving. "I get up very early, always have, but I'll try not to wake you. There are magazines there on the table by your bed, and a whole library full of books across the hall. You can bring some of them in here tomorrow and keep them handy. I always read a while before I go to sleep; may be a habit, but I like to read when everything is still and quiet. I can easily read myself drowsy."

When Marianna was ready for bed she sat down and peered out the window. A silver sickle of a moon was struggling through the clouds high in the heavens. It looked strange outside—no lights anywhere to be seen, just a cold, black, strange world. Winter had the old house in an icy grip. The wind would sigh, quiet down, then start again, rattling a door or window somewhere. Bare branches clicked overhead. There was a strange little grating that could have

been a mouse, or the wind scratching a bony finger along a metal gutter.

What would she do tomorrow? All the tomorrows? She felt utterly alone and lonely, so alien to her new surroundings. She admitted to herself that she had pictured nothing quite this bleak and lonely. She wished she might see Philip Randall. She knew he had an influence over her. He was such a fine person, with such strict integrity; perhaps she wanted to be someone of whom he would approve. But why torture herself with thoughts of him? His feeling for her was compassion—nothing more.

Tomorrow she would spend some time in the library; she would lose herself in books, forget the past. She was away from it now—the social life she could only look on with envy and bitterness. And she was away from the people she had known—and from the pity in their eyes and in their voices.

She crawled between the white sheets that her electric blanket had warmed, nestled into her own down pillow, and was soon in dreamless sleep such as she had not had for weeks.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Marianna opened her eyes and lay for a moment trying to orient herself. Then, her eyes going to the blazing fire roaring up the chimney, she remembered where she was. But how had anyone come in and made a fire without awakening her? She couldn't recall ever sleeping so soundly. Was it because her mind was more at rest now that she was away from home and friends?

For a moment a sense of utter desolation enveloped her. What a life stretching ahead for a girl of twenty-one! What a contrast to a few months ago when she had been planning a brilliant wedding. But she knew if she were to have any peace of mind, she must take this day by day, not letting her mind go backward or forward, not even thinking of the future, making no plans for it.

She got up and had a leisurely bath; the little heater must have burned all night, because her bathroom was warm. She heard no sound; the utter stillness of the house seemed uncanny. She was completely dressed when there came a knock at her door. It was Martha "Your breakfast is ready any time you want it."

It was eight o'clock, and when Marianna went to the kitchen, she learned that the rest of the family had breakfasted long ago, that her uncle had gone to his study and Jim Fowler had gone about his duties. Martha busied herself in the kitchen. There was a big coal range there, a small table covered with a red-checked cloth. Martha explained that they usually ate breakfast in here, that the dining room was so large it was hard to heat.

"Like your eggs scrambled or poached?"

"No eggs, thank you, Mrs. Fowler. Just coffee and juice."

"Call me Martha, the rest of them do. I'm not used to being called Mrs. Fowler, and I'm liable to be looking around to see who you're talking to. I have some nice hot biscuits here, and I wish you'd let me fix you an egg. You'll be hungry before lunch."

"I often have only coffee and fruit juice."

"I'll get you some juice, then. Orange or grapefruit?"

"Orange, please."

"I have some waffle batter made up. Didn't know whether you ate biscuits or not. Your uncle likes waffles. I make them often for him."

Marianna said again that she wanted only the coffee and juice, but added that she would try the waffles another day.

A large yellow cat, purring loudly, rubbed against Marianna's legs. The big collie, Jock, lay on the floor with his head on his paws, looking on indifferently.

"Cat's name is Cleo," Martha said. "She wants you to look at her kittens in that box behind the stove. She's very proud of them."

Marianna saw the four tiny fluffy kittens playing in the big box. They were too cunning to be ignored. Surprising herself, she said, "May I hold one of them?"

Martha picked up a yellow one like its mother. She held it by the back of the neck and dropped it in Marianna's lap. It immediately began playing with a button on her dress, while Cleo purred louder.

"I thought Mr. Fowler said they were at the barn."

"Oh, that's another cat, a barn cat named Smokey. She rarely comes to the house. Jim feeds her when he takes feed to the other animals. He calls her Smokey because she's the color of smoke, I reckon. She has four coal black kittens all with blue eyes. They're larger than these. Cleo's always in the kitchen."

"What do you do with all the kittens?"

"Oh, Jim keeps some of them around the barn, and Camellia finds homes for them down in the village. They're always so adorable, there's not much trouble giving them away."

Martha poured coffee and put a glass of frosted orange juice on the little table. The coffee was steaming, fragrant, and strong, and it made Marianna feel better.

"Look," she exclaimed suddenly, a touch of excitement in her voice, "it's snowing!"

Wandering small flakes were pressing against the windows, drifting fleetingly here and there.

Martha glanced up. "Probably won't get much today, but if you're here long enough, you're sure to see a real snow. It stays on the ground for weeks sometimes. It's much colder up here on the hill than it is down below."

Outside, there was a gray pall over everything. Skies were leaden, the air was still and cold.

While Marianna drank her coffee Martha cleaned up the

kitchen, then put a pan of potatoes on the table in front of Marianna. "Wouldn't you like to peel these for me?" she said. "I always get my dinner started right after breakfast; then it doesn't take long to get it ready in the evening."

Marianna looked up in astonishment, a little resentful. She had never peeled a potato in her life; she had done no cooking of any kind; she was a complete stranger to kitchens. But what difference did that make? she reasoned now; she had nothing else to do. She picked up the knife and started clumsily peeling a potato.

Martha glanced at her. "Land sakes, child, that isn't the way. I forgot you've probably never done any cooking."

"No," Marianna said, "but I don't mind if you'll show me how."

"Just thought you might like to be occupied," Martha said kindly, "but you'd better let me take over. You're liable to hurt yourself, and you're peeling too thick."

"I'm not good for much of anything," Marianna said a little bitterly, "but it does seem as though I should be able to peel a potato. Let me try."

Martha sat down at the table and picked up another knife. "Just watch me, and take off only a thin peeling."

Suddenly Marianna laughed and Martha looked up questioningly.

"I was just thinking," Marianna said, but did not explain further. She had been thinking of her friends and what they would say if they could see her now. They would probably still be asleep, after a night of frolicking, or if they were up at all, they would be getting ready to go shopping, or to a morning bridge party. While she sat in the kitchen of a lonely farmhouse peeling potatoes. She felt like putting her head down on the table and weeping, but a new courage had come to her. She would grin and bear it. No one had made her come up here; it had been her own choosing, and she would take whatever happened. Perhaps there was as much satisfaction in peeling potatoes as there was in idle chit-chat with friends. Her eyes were bright with tears she would not let spill over.

Pretending not to notice, Martha said briskly, "There! You're doing all right now. I've got to go and make the beds. The fire in the living room has been going since six o'clock, and it will be warm in there in a little while. There's radio and television and the piano. Lots of music in the cabinet, although I reckon most of it is as old as the hills. Camel-

lia brings some of hers over sometimes and plays for the doctor. She's a good musician, and he enjoys her playing. And there's always plenty of books and magazines around."

When Martha had gone about her other duties, Marianna got up and made her way to the living room. It was not as warm as the kitchen, being heated only by the fireplace, but big logs were burning brightly, and it was comfortable enough, and very cozy with the big sofa, deep-cushioned chairs, and gay chintzes.

Marianna was standing at the window, leaning on her crutch, watching the snowflakes fluttering down, when she felt something cold on her hand and turning, saw the big collie standing there.

"Are you lonely too, fellow?" she said. "If you are, I know how you feel." She put a hand on the dog's head, and his tail thumped. She sat down on the low windowseat, and he bounced up beside her. She petted him absently, wondering a little vaguely why her aunt had never gotten her a pet. Probably because she had never shown any interest in one. She wondered if she hadn't missed something. She liked this dog and those tiny, playful kittens, even though she had made up her mind she would never like anything again.

It was bleak-looking outside, dreary and cold, but there was a certain beauty about it that she found restful, and she was not sorry that she had come to Hilltop. She must be changing a little. She did not crave excitement and gaiety. She felt secure here, safe from prying eyes and pitying glances.

She moved to the piano, found some music in the cabinet, and sat down to play. An hour later her uncle came in, threw more logs on the fire, and said, "I've been listening. You play well. I stopped working for my coffee break. Come on out to the kitchen and have some with me."

At home everyone had jumped to wait on her since her accident. Celeste, the maid, or Marianna's aunt would have brought the coffee to her, with never a suggestion that she do things for herself. But here, Uncle Bruce just said come and get it. It made her feel more normal. She didn't know he had told Martha and Jim to let her wait on herself as much as possible, that he thought it would help her.

Marianna limped to the kitchen, slid into a chair he pulled out for her at the little table. The collie sat at her feet.

"Martha always keeps coffee on the stove," Bruce Liv-

ingston said. "I walk in at odd times for a cup. I see you and Jock have made friends."

"He rather insisted." Marianna smiled. "He follows me around."

Her uncle looked at her thoughtfully, then said, "When we've finished this coffee, I'll take you to my workshop."

"Are you writing something now?"

"I'm always writing something. Right now it happens to be an article on butterflies for a magazine. When I get my final draft completed, Camellia Trent types it for me. She does beautiful work, and it keeps me from having to go to a typist in town. Camellia's a very busy woman. I wonder how she finds the time, but she says she enjoys it."

Marianna glanced out the window. "The snow is coming down harder. Do you suppose we'll get a real snow this time?"

"We rarely do in November, but it *has* happened. Did you ever see a picture of snowflakes?"

Marianna said she hadn't.

"I have some I'll show you of magnified snowflakes. Some are like stars, others like spider webs, and some like a flower opening. It's really fantastic."

When they finished their coffee, he led the way to the rooms he called his workshop. They looked quite disorderly to Marianna, but he said he knew just where to put his hands on everything and had instructed Martha never to change a thing. Marianna spent some time looking at the pictures of the snowflakes, and of butterflies, and of other insects and nature exhibits. At first she was merely being polite, but after a while she grew interested, and an hour passed before she realized it. She told him she would like to come in and help him sometime if there was anything she could do.

Glancing at his watch, he said, "We have soup and sandwiches at noon, but if you care for more, of course Martha will gladly fix it for you. Our dinner always comes in the evening."

Marianna said she was not a hearty eater, and when they got back to the kitchen, Martha was dishing up thick, hot soup with a layer of melted cheese floating on top, and there was a platter of toasted cheese squares to go with it. Also, a big dark cake with white icing, and tall glasses of milk.

After they had finished, Martha said, "If you'd like to lie

down for a while, you can rest in there on the sofa. I'll bring you a blanket, and you won't be disturbed."

Marianna said she never lay down during the day, but after Uncle Bruce had returned to his study and Martha had gone about her housework, everything was very quiet and Marianna decided she might as well lie down. She wouldn't sleep; she would just rest. But in a short time she felt herself growing drowsy. Soon she was sleeping soundly.

The afternoon was darkening when she awakened. The snow had stopped except for a few flurries, and the ground was lightly covered. There was a white-grayness over the world, and the skies were leaden. It looked like more snow. Looking out the window, Marianna thought how much the scene looked like a Currier and Ives Christmas card. When she sat up, Martha appeared in the doorway. She wore a heavy coat, and her head was tied up in a woolen scarf.

"Awake? You've had a long nap. I peeped in several times, and once I came in and put more logs on the fire, and you never moved. I was afraid I might wake you."

"I can't understand my sleeping like that," Marianna exclaimed. "I never take a nap, and I certainly had plenty of sleep last night."

"You've probably just now relaxed. Nothing pushing you now, no plans ahead—no company liable to drop in. It makes a difference. Do you want to walk up to the barn with me?"

Marianna looked a bit startled by the suggestion, and Martha said, "It isn't far. I'm sure you can make it all right. You can wrap up good. I think it will do you good to get outside: you've been in all day with no fresh air."

Marianna said she would go. She felt a tingle of pleasure. Until now everyone seemed to think that she couldn't do things. It gave her a feeling of exhilaration to be treated as though she were normal.

"I'll get that heavy brown coat I hung up with your things last night," Martha was saying. "You won't want your fur coat out in this weather; it's liable to start snowing again any time."

She brought the coat, a warm head scarf, and a pair of woolen gloves.

The lane to the barn was rutted and a bit rough, but along the sides it was smooth, and Marianna made her way without much difficulty. They went through the big gates,

which Martha unfastened. Jock went racing ahead, stopping at intervals for a bite of the snow.

Martha slowed her steps without making it obvious. She talked about the farm, the weather, various things, and paused once to let Marianna rest a moment, making no reference to it, taking the pause to point out certain things. Only once did she say, casually, "Sure you can make it?" Marianna said she thought she could, and it was not referred to again.

Martha gathered eggs, then told Marianna to look in a certain nest, and Marianna was thrilled to find several freshly laid eggs, one still warm, with feathers curling around it. All the eggs she knew anything about came out of paper boxes.

The big barn smelled of animals, hay, and milk. The animals there looked content in their stalls. The hired man had just fed them. He called to Jock to go out with him, to hunt a couple of stray lambs, and Martha said, "He knows Jim won't rest at night until he knows all the animals are under shelter."

Marianna saw the big cat Smokey and the four black kittens. They were lapping milk from a shallow pan. "I remember this barn," Marianna said. "I remember saying that time I came up when I was a little girl that I had never been inside a barn before—and I haven't been in one since."

Martha said, "I've always thought there was something cozy about a barn. I remember when I was a child I always liked to play in the barn—but then I'm country-bred."

It was snowing again when they started back to the house, but Marianna didn't mind. She felt a strange elation; there was something so free and serene here. And she liked the sting of the little flakes on her face. She thought of them as she had seen them magnified this morning. It didn't seem possible they were all different, and so beautiful.

She was a little breathless when they reached the house, but she would not complain, and Martha said only, "That walk probably got you up an appetite. Now you go in and sit by the fire, and I'll get dinner on the table. Jim will be along soon. Hungry?"

"Not as indifferent to food as I was this morning," Marianna admitted as they went inside. "And something smells delicious."

"That's the roast browning, I think—I left the oven turned low—or maybe it's the macaroni and cheese."

Marianna said at dinner that she could not remember

when she had enjoyed food more, that the walk and air certainly had given her an appetite.

There was more bridge after dinner, but they played only until nine, and soon afterward Marianna was back in her room, getting ready for bed. Her first day had gone, and she realized she hadn't been as unhappy as she was at home. *I won't look back and I won't look ahead too far,* she thought, *but how long can I stay like this?* She couldn't answer that, but she wouldn't worry about it now. She was drowsy, and there was ahead another night of restful sleep. She would not think; she would close her mind to everything, and sleep.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Days followed each other in much the same pattern until they were weeks. Each morning Marianna spent some time with her uncle in his study. At first she did so from a sense of duty because she felt he liked her being there, explaining things to her, but after a while she found herself very much interested in the things he showed her and told her. He talked about the frost, the hail, and the sleet, things she had never been curious about before. There was the magnified acorn with the whole oak tree inside. He showed her pictures of rare birds, explaining their habits, as well as the mocker, the cardinal, the nightingale, and the more common birds, such as jays and sparrows. He showed her flowers in all the developing stages and talked to her about his work. He was especially interested in the butterfly; he told her about it in all stages, the larvae, the cocoon, the caterpillar, and how it shed its covering until the beautiful butterfly emerged in its perfection. One day he said that people were like that; it took many stages to develop character. She wondered if he was thinking about her, but she didn't mind. She realized that already there was a change in her, first noticed in her association with Dr. Philip Randall. Her sense of values was undergoing a revision; she could see the shallowness of her past life. She realized, but without self-condemnation, that she had always been selfish. She could see that in many ways she was a product of her environment; most of her friends shared some of her characteristics. The important thing was that she was no longer blind to her lackings.

Dr. Livingston was beginning a novel. Heretofore his writings had been essays and treatises, but now he was going to try his hand at a Civil War historical, and Marianna was flattered that he asked her for suggestions and discussed his story with her. This gave her a new interest, and they developed a shared intimacy.

She was taking some exercise, too. Usually, she walked to the barn with Martha in the afternoons to get the eggs; by now she was calling all the animals by their names. Some-

times she accompanied her uncle on his walks. On these occasions he did not walk far, but this was the only recognition he gave to her lameness.

There had been no more snow, but the days were mostly cold and gray, with winds whirling the leaves over the yard. There were a few days of sunshine, cold and clear, with the air like wine, and Marianna saw for the first time the magnificent view of the surrounding country spread out from Hilltop.

One morning she awakened to hear voices in the kitchen, and looking at her watch, she found that she had slept very late. It had been decided in the beginning that Martha would never awaken her. Breakfast was such a casual thing, Marianna could have hers whenever she got up. She had forgotten all about her former habit of juice and coffee for breakfast and now ate heartily of eggs and bacon or sausage, waffles or muffins or pancakes.

"I've been planning to come over before," the strange voice was saying, "but I lacked just a little typing on this last manuscript and was determined to finish it before I came. I have it with me now. And I do want to meet Marianna."

The woman's voice was low and musical and well modulated, and Marianna surmised correctly that this was Camellia Trent. Marianna dressed and went out to the kitchen, and Camellia said, "I'm really a very early caller, but my days are so full. I have to allocate my time—so much for this and so much for that—but I've been wanting to come over ever since I knew you were here."

Marianna didn't know what she had expected in Camellia Trent, but it certainly had not been a woman so young looking, or so attractive. Uncle Bruce had said she was thirty-six, but this woman looked scarcely thirty, except for a few shining threads of silver in her brown hair. Her figure was slim and rounded, her cheeks had color, and her eyes were alive and sparkling. And Marianna thought her low, soft voice was the most attractive she had ever heard. She found herself wondering why her uncle hadn't fallen in love with this woman, and she with him. It was after Camellia had gone that Marianna mentioned this to Martha, and Martha said, "Land sakes, child, I shouldn't be saying it, but that woman worships Bruce Livingston. Couldn't you see it when she talked about him? She's been in love with him a long time, but he's too blind to see it."

Camellia drove over to Hilltop a few days later to get Marianna to spend the day with her at Shadowlawn. Marianna went.

Camellia kept house for her widower brother, and just the two of them lived in the low, sprawling farmhouse. It was more modern than Hilltop, much more attractive inside and out. Camellia explained that she did practically all her own work, only occasionally driving to the village for a colored woman who gave the place a thorough cleaning. In addition to running the house, she had a greenhouse where she experimented with growing things, and she had hundreds of chickens. "I've been here a long time," she explained. "I married when I was very young, seventeen in fact, and lost my husband after a year, so I hardly feel that I've ever had any other sort of life than the one I've lived here. Soon after my husband died, my brother and I decided to go on together."

"You don't ever get lonely?"

"Lonely? There's no time for loneliness when you're helping to run a farm. Sometimes I don't even sit down until midafternoon, and then before I've had time to really get rested, there's supper to get. We used to have a couple who lived here on the place, like Martha and Jim Fowler at Hilltop, but they went away, and now John has two hired men who come up from the village to help him."

Marianna noticed the piano and spoke of it.

"Oh, yes, I play. When supper's over, we're free for that day, and it's really my only leisure time. I used to play well, but I've neglected it so."

"When do you have time to do Uncle Bruce's typing?"

Camellia laughed. "That job just sort of fell on me. I offered to type one thing for him when the weather was so bad he said he didn't want to go into town, and so I've been doing it ever since. Of course I have to do it at night."

"You use your only leisure time working for someone else?"

"Oh, I don't mind," Camellia said carelessly. "I have an electric machine, or rather, Bruce brought one over, and when I get started, the work simply vanishes. I find myself so interested in what I'm typing that it isn't such a chore. And I really like to help him." Marianna thought of what Martha had said and wondered if it was really true—and why her uncle didn't know it.

There was a big collie walking around, and Camellia said, "His name is Major; he's a brother to Jock. They came from the same litter, and your uncle brought him to me when he was six weeks old."

"I noticed the dog runs and all the little doghouses as we drove in the gates. You have other dogs—didn't I see several others?"

Camellia laughed. "I suppose some people think I'm crazy, at least eccentric—in fact, John didn't like the idea at first, but he goes along with it now and humors me. The kennel you saw I call 'Haven for the Friendless.' There are all sorts of dogs there. I get some of them from the dog pound and some from the humane shelter, rehabilitate them, and find homes for them. I even advertise for homes Some of them were pitiful when I brought them here, but they're sleek and fat now and would make nice pets."

"How on earth do you find the time to do everything you do?"

"I manage, but I have to cram practically every minute. I started with one forlorn little puppy I saw by the side of the road; someone had abandoned it. John says sometimes he hates to see me go to town because I always come back with a dog or two I've picked up somewhere. My Haven is well known now, and people from town come up here looking for dogs. It's nearing Christmas now, and some of them will be wanted for Christmas presents for children. I really get fond of them and hate to see them go, but of course I'm glad when they get good homes."

"They probably couldn't get a better one than they have right here."

"That's true, materially. But a dog needs affection and attention, just as a child does, and I can't furnish that except in a general way."

"Didn't you get lonely up here away from everything when you first came?"

"Oh, yes, of course. That first year was pretty bad, but after I got busy— There were certain things that had to be done, even when we had the couple here. Work is a great panacea for loneliness and heartache, Marianna. You get so busy you just forget about yourself." Her eyes softened and she added, "Then I met Dr. Livingston. He helped me over some of the lonely places, gave me the typing to do, taught me a lot about flowers, and started the

greenhouse for me. I planted a garden, I learned to sew, and so the years have flown. And now I'm thirty-six."

Camellia's brother, John, came in for lunch. He was a big, homely, kind man, well mannered; a typical farmer with little interest in anything outside his farm. He was a hard worker and said his only diversion was television at night, and that often he fell asleep watching it.

And yet, Marianna mused, these people seemed far happier and content than most of the people she knew at home, always rushing feverishly from one thing to another, having so many material things that everything lost flavor. . . .

Shortly before Christmas Marianna had a letter from her Aunt Mary saying she was sure Marianna would want to be at home for the holidays, reasoning that by now Marianna had had enough of the farm and would want to stay home. She reported that Stan had called, insisting on knowing her whereabouts. Others too, including Dr. Randall, who had been somewhat impatient about her going away without telling him, and who said he would like her to come back to the hospital for more X-rays.

Marianna was not anxious to go back. She still shrank at the thought of mixing with her old crowd. There would be Christmas dances, other festivities at which she would be only an onlooker. The old sense of frustration and humiliation swept over her just thinking about it. Here, she never had that feeling. Here, she had begun even to forget her condition.

Uncle Bruce said he thought she should go. Christmas would be dull and lonely for her here, and if she stayed, she would probably wish she had gone. She could, of course, come back whenever and if she wished. The doctor was probably right that she should have additional X-rays now.

Camellia Trent had a telephone, and Marianna called her aunt and said she would come down the day before Christmas Eve. There was some Christmas shopping she should do in the meantime, and Camellia said she would take her down to the village one day and they would shop together. They went, but most of the time Marianna sat in the car, and Camellia did her shopping for her. There were presents to get for those here at Hilltop as well as the family at home, and she wanted to give something special to Glenda Carlson. It was a strange way to have to go shopping. Memories came of last Christmas, when it had been so much fun, and the most heartbreaking memory of all was of flying to Lake

Placid for a few days of skiing right after Christmas. Skating and skiing had been so much fun—fun she would never have again.

Sitting by Camellia's fire, drinking hot, fragrant tea, Marianna found herself telling Camellia all about Stan and her broken engagement. She had had no intention of talking so intimately, but there was something about this quiet, friendly woman that inspired confidence. She felt that Camellia understood her attitude toward her condition and her old life.

Marianna talked about her spirited horse, of how she loved to ride, how she played tennis and golf with Stan. She explained that when he asked her to marry him, it seemed a good idea, for they liked the same things, had the same background.

When she had finished, Camellia said, "I don't believe your heart is involved to any great extent. I mean you're not really suffering from heartache over the broken engagement."

Marianna admitted she was right, that it was more a case of pride.

"Then it will not be difficult for you to forget," Camellia prophesied. "It's when you live with it daily, when it's always there, an incurable little ache, that it's so bad. Believe me, I know."

"You mean you were in love with someone and—and it didn't turn out right?"

Camellia said, "Not past tense. It's present. You so generously told me about yourself, I'll tell you about me. Of course this is all in confidence, and it must be the same as if we hadn't had this talk. Martha knows. I'm sure John knows. I guess they all do except Bruce."

Marianna's eyes widened. "You mean you're really in love with Uncle Bruce?"

"I've been in love with him for years, and the dear man is so engrossed in his work that he hasn't the faintest idea of it. I hope I can keep it that way."

"But why doesn't he wake up?" Marianna exclaimed. "You would be so good for each other, and I'm sure he must get lonely at times. Something should be done to wake him up."

"Well—exactly what? I can't very well go over there and say, 'See here, Bruce Livingston, I'm in love with you, and what are you going to do about it?' "

Marianna laughed. "Might not be a bad idea, but of course you couldn't. But there should be *some* way for him to be shocked into awareness."

"I used to hope that he would fall in love with me before he knew how I felt about him, but the years pass, and I guess his heart is in cold storage."

"I think he was very much in love with his young wife."

"I know—and I was in love with my husband. But they're both dead, and we're alive—and it was a long time ago."

"And it's such a waste," Marianna said thoughtfully. "I'm wondering when I'm thirty-six if I'll be wishing that I had married Stan—or someone."

"Well, you should, not Stan especially, but you shouldn't live out the years alone. No woman should. I wouldn't marry a man I didn't love; I wouldn't advise any woman to do that. But there will be someone sometime you can fall in love with."

"But no one would ever fall in love with a crippled girl."

"Someone will. And I never think of you as lame."

"Whether you think of me that way or not doesn't alter the fact that I can't walk as other people do, and I do know that few men would be interested in me as I am *now*."

"That's one reason I feel perhaps it would be better for you to go back and mix with your friends again. At least there's opportunity there for you to meet someone. There never will be here on this lonely hilltop. If you stay, the years will pass for you just as they have for me."

"But you're not unhappy?"

"No. I was, for a long time, but I've found contentment. I've made a life for myself, and it may be that I'm happier here than I would be anywhere else. But I'll be old someday; what will I have then? It's probably nice to have grown children around, grandchildren to take an interest in Oh well, things have a way of coming out all right. I'm just not going to worry about the future."

CHAPTER NINE

At the last moment Marianna almost backed out. Martha said if she wanted to spend the holidays at Hilltop, they would have a Christmas tree and she would ask Camellia and John Trent over for dinner, and Marianna was almost persuaded, thinking how effortless and pleasant it would be. No excitement, no hurrying. And it might snow again, and they would have a white Christmas They could go into the woods and get their tree, and she and Martha could decorate it.

But it was the conversation she had had with Camellia about the future that decided her to go home and *try*. If she could fit in with her old life for a while, these weeks at Hilltop would be just a dimly remembered dream—an interlude that had helped her get back to normal. Aunt Mary said she had not really given her friends a chance, that she had been too sensitive about her lameness. If she had never gone away, would they, in time, have learned to ignore it as her friends did here on the hill?

Jacques, the family chauffeur, came for her about midmorning on the day before Christmas Eve. Martha had packed one bag for her; she had plenty of clothes at home, and for the present she would leave here most of the things she had brought with her.

She felt a faint excitement stirring as she went out to the big, warm, luxurious car, where Jacques stood respectfully holding the door open. Uncle Bruce, Martha, and the big collie were there, and she felt a tug at her heart as she waved to them as the big car rolled away. Would this be the last she would see them? Were her days at Hilltop over? She had been there only six weeks, and already it seemed like home. Whether she returned to stay or not, she knew she would come back to see the orchards in bloom, to see the place in all its spring glory.

"There's some snow in the air here," Jacques said, "but we won't get any after we get down in the valley."

Marianna told him they already had had several snows.

"Guess you're glad to be going back." The chauffeur seemed to take it for granted.

"In a way, of course," Marianna replied. "I'll be glad to see the folks."

"They've missed you. You're not planning on going back up there?" The man's voice sounded utterly incredulous.

"I—I'm not sure, Jacques. I have no plans. In a way I liked it up there very much."

The nearer she got to home, the more the old uncertainty came back. Decisions to be made again. Would she do this or that? Did she want to go here or there, and *could* she do this or that?

As they came up the drive of the Marshall home, Marianna saw that the house was brilliantly lighted, and she felt a warm sense of homecoming as she entered the luxurious interior. Home! Why had she felt it such a prison? The house was beautiful with Christmas decorations, and a huge silver-white tree standing in an ingle glistened with blue nights. There were many gift-wrapped packages beneath the tree. There was an air that impressed Marianna familiarly and pleasantly. Of course this was where she belonged; she was used to luxury and beautiful things, to comfort and ease.

She received a royal welcome from everyone. Her Aunt Mary hoped she was over whatever whim it was that had taken her away, taking it for granted that she was back to stay.

Marianna soon found that whenever she attempted to rise from a chair or do anything at all for herself, either Celeste or her aunt was there to help her—reminding her of her handicap at every turn. She could not convince them that she could do things for herself, that it was better for her to do so.

Late in the afternoon Stan came. He remarked several times on how wonderful she looked and asked why she had run away. He seemed genuinely glad that she was back home. His manner was friendly, if indulgent. He mentioned many Christmas parties as though he expected her to go.

Other friends drifted in, among them Barbara, and Marianna noticed without jealousy that her manner toward Stan was somewhat possessive. There were an even dozen present when the butler brought in cocktails. Her aunt had not told her she had invited anyone, but now Marianna was sure of it. If she had been asked, she would no doubt have said

that she preferred no company, so her aunt had gone ahead without consulting her. More people came in, several dozen, all telling her how wonderful it was to see her and that they hoped she was home to stay. But they talked of things and events of which Marianna knew nothing; it was almost as though she were a stranger. And they talked too much, without saying anything, and they drank too many cocktails. Cocktails were never served at Hilltop; in fact, Marianna had never heard one mentioned there.

When they had all left, Marianna said she would call Glenda Carlson. Her aunt's disapproval was obvious. After all, Glenda wasn't in Marianna's crowd, she said, and they had little in common. And Marianna would no doubt see her tomorrow if she went to the hospital for the X-rays.

But Marianna called anyway and found Glenda still at the hospital.

"Oh—*Marianna!*" Glenda greeted her. "We were just talking about you this afternoon, Dr. Randall and I. He said he had arranged with your aunt to bring you over tomorrow for X-rays. Where on earth have you been?"

"Away visiting," Marianna said.

"And you're back to stay?"

"I don't know."

"Well, we certainly hope you don't go away again. And I'm sure Dr. Randall won't want you to. He was much disturbed when he found you had gone away. He wanted you to continue the therapy."

"I'm not kidding myself, Glenda," Marianna said lightly. "I know that I'm never going to walk without a crutch, and there's no use taking his time, or mine."

"But you are coming to the hospital tomorrow?"

"Yes, because my aunt had already made the appointment. In the meantime can't you come over to see me?"

Glenda said she had a date with Bill, but they would come by for a little while. They came in after dinner. They both expressed surprise on seeing Marianna looking so much better, and Glenda said, "Wherever you've been, whatever you've been doing, it has been good for you." And Bill said, "You're more of a doll than ever, Marianna. You look good enough to eat. If I weren't already in love with this woman here, I'd surely fall in love with you. And if she doesn't treat me right, I may, anyway."

Idle talk, of course, but the admiration she saw in the young doctor's eyes raised Marianna's morale. If there were

just some chance, some hope, that she might be normal again, what fun it would be to go out with him; he was always so gay and effervescent. Something clicked in her mind then: she had been here only a few hours and already the frustration and wishful thinking had returned. But she forced them away from her. *I'm going to try to be one of them again,* she told herself; *I'll make myself do it.*

Bill and Glenda were on their way to a Christmas party, and they invited Marianna to join them. She thought wistfully it would have been fun to go, but intuition told her they were only being polite, and she declined, saying she would see them the next day at the hospital.

Stan had told Marianna that he would call her late tomorrow, that he wanted her to go to a cocktail party with him. She had told him she would go, and she would. Perhaps after two or three times she would not feel so self-conscious; at least, she would grit her teeth and try.

Barbara hadn't looked pleased when Stan invited Marianna, but Barbara should concede that Marianna was entitled to some consideration. After all, their engagement *had* been announced, and it was not her fault that it had had to be terminated.

Marianna slept late the next morning, and it was not until after ten o'clock that her aunt told her to answer her bedside telephone, that Dr. Randall wanted to talk to her.

She closed her eyes, took a deep breath as the well-remembered, attractive voice said, "That you, Marianna?"

She said that it was. Then her spirits dipped when he said briefly, entirely professional, "Are you getting over here today for those X-rays?"

Marianna had a sudden inclination to say no, but she had promised her aunt, so she told Dr. Randall that she would be at the hospital around noon.

"I was thinking I might come for you," he said cheerfully. "Glenda gave me a favorable report on your general condition, and I'd like to talk to you. I may be busy when you get to the hospital."

Marianna said indifferently that it didn't matter, that if he had the time to come, she would be glad to go with him.

When she put the telephone back in the cradle, her eyes were bright. She had been at fault, of course, in ever imagining he had more than a professional interest in her; no

doubt he had already forgotten that day he took her to lunch. He was interested in her as a case; his interest was in seeing her walk again. If it were possible that she ever got back to normal, his interest would cease and she would hear from him no more.

Dr. Randall telephoned just before the time he was supposed to come for her and said that he was tied up and couldn't possibly get away, that if her aunt would drive her over, he would take her home later.

The visit to the hospital was very tiring, and when she left the hospital with Dr. Randall, the sun was gone and the day was gray and cold. "It's Christmas Eve," the doctor said suddenly, "but I have only a few hours to spare. I'm operating at seven. An emergency coming to the hospital from out of town, and they wanted me to do the work."

"And of course you wouldn't refuse, even on Christmas Eve?"

"Of course not," he said decisively. "I realize it is a time when everyone should be free and happy, but it doesn't always work out that way. I'm sure it isn't a very pleasant Christmas for the parents who are bringing the boy to me. I hope I can make it a little brighter for them." He paused, then said, "So many people have lost sight of the real meaning of Christmas. If it is Christ's birthday, why celebrate with cocktail parties and foolishness? All the money that is spent on parties could feed poor families for weeks. Christmas has been so commercialized that it has lost its meaning for many people." The roads were slick, and he was looking straight ahead, driving carefully.

Marianna said, "I don't believe I've ever known anyone before who talked like that." Then she remembered Camellia Trent. "Yes, I do know one other person. She said something like that not long ago—a woman I met while I was away."

In a more cheerful tone he said, "But we can't change the world. We just have to take care of our own little orbit and do the best we can, which is what I try to do. And I have a couple of hours to spend with you. I'll try to be more cheerful. Tell me about yourself, what you've been doing, where you've been, and why you ran away without telling me."

Marianna snuggled down in her warm fur coat, aware of a little thrill as her shoulder touched his. "I didn't run away exactly My uncle came to see me, and I had a sudden im-

pulse to get away. I couldn't live my life here as I've always lived it, and I didn't like being out of things, having my friends sorry for me. I decided I would be better satisfied away from it all."

"And this place you've been with your uncle, were you happy there?"

The question brought to Marianna a vision of the big farmhouse, with the roaring fires, the snow on the ground. Of Martha and Jim and the kittens and Jock and the walks to the barn over the frozen ground. She was silent so long he said, "You didn't answer me."

"I was thinking it out," she said then. "And no, I wouldn't say that I was happy, just that I was less miserable, and there was something compelling and satisfying about it. I think I've grown up a little since I went away." Her voice stopped on a sigh.

"You don't want to tell me more?"

"About the place? Well, it was just an old farmhouse on top of a hill; a housekeeper, her husband, and my uncle were the only other occupants and my only associates until I met a neighbor a short while ago. She's a very lovely person."

"You're not thinking of going back?"

Marianna asked herself the question and answered honestly, "I—I'm not sure. I don't think I'm going to be any better satisfied here than I was before, but I don't know. I'm still mixed up."

"Have you honestly tried, Marianna? Have you said to yourself, 'I will go ahead with my life and do the best I can not to let my handicap spoil it'?"

"No," she said honestly, "I haven't done that because, you see, it *has* spoiled it. I should think you could see that."

"I think I can understand how you feel—a beautiful girl, engaged to be married, having it all suddenly taken away. But how much is that sort of thing really worth? I mean the social merry-go-round. And how much real worth is there to some of your old companions? Is there anything really rewarding in that sort of life? It's fleeting, to say the least. Oh, I'm not preaching—" He broke off and laughed. "But at times a certain stratum of society irks me; it seems so useless. Personally, I have no desire to get on the merry-go-round. You really haven't lost a lot by slipping out of that indolent crowd who think only in terms of what they can get out of life, not what they can put into it."

"It's the only crowd I've ever known," Marianna said a bit defensively.

"And some of them are fine people," he said immediately. "I'm not condemning them, just their way of life, frittering away the hours with nothing gained, nothing really worthwhile. And if you didn't have a little finer mettle in your character, you would never have gone away."

Marianna said, "I won't take any credit for that. If I had never had my accident, I would have gone on as I've always been doing, being one of them, all the rest of my life."

"That's one of the things we never know, what we would have done under other circumstances. You might have found something better."

Her mind turning backward, she said, "I don't suppose you saw the X-rays that were taken this afternoon?"

"No. I won't be able to see them until tomorrow. I have a friend who is a great bone specialist, Dr. Correlli. He's with the Mayo Clinic. I'd like him to look at them. I've been in touch with him by telephone, and I'll either fly the plates to him, or, if possible, he'll come here, just as a favor to me."

"You just want to see if there is any change?"

"I want someone else's opinion—I mean someone really expert, as to the advisability of an operation. I'll know more when I see those pictures tomorrow."

"I don't want an operation," Marianna said flatly.

"But I'm sure you would be willing if he thinks there's a chance of your getting back to normal, wouldn't you?"

"I have no faith in it."

He turned and looked at her. One hand left the wheel and took possession of one of hers. "Do you know, Marianna, I have a feeling that you're going to walk again as well as you ever did."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I want to believe it. Professionally speaking, I've never seen any logical reason why you can't walk; as you know, it has us all baffled. But whatever it is, I have a strong feeling that time and nature will cure it."

"You don't know," she said impulsively, "you can't know how very much I want to be my old self again, to ride and dance and be active. If I'll always be as I am now, my life will be very empty."

"Not necessarily. You can find new interests, as I tried to point out a while ago."

Irrelevantly, she said, "Glenda Carlson came to see me last night. She and Bill Drake."

"Yes," the doctor said, "she told me."

"Don't mind my asking, Doctor, but are you in love with Glenda?"

"I? In love with Glenda?" The surprise in his voice was genuine. He turned and looked at her as though he could not even grasp such an idea. Then he said with conviction, "Of course not. Glenda is a wonderful person; she's a grand person and my right hand. What put such an idea into your head?"

"I don't know. I just wondered."

"Glenda would think that ridiculous," he said. "I think she's engaged to Bill. Half-engaged, anyway—his half. He's very much in love with her." Then he said quietly, "There hasn't been much time in my life for romance. I've been wedded to my work for so long. It has to come first and foremost."

"You just haven't met the right one yet," Marianna said lightly.

He looked down at her, smiled, and said, "I wonder," and let it go at that.

CHAPTER TEN

A few days after Christmas Marianna said, "Aunt Mary, I'm going back to Hilltop. Can Jacques take me?"

Surprised, her aunt echoed. "Going back? But, darling, I thought you were having such a nice time. You've been feeling so well, and I thought you were getting adjusted. Your friends have been so nice to you."

"Yes," Marianna agreed, "they have. And I suspect it's because you asked them to be nice to me. They've been a little bored in the process. How do you think I feel when they talk of a breakfast at the Hunt Club and then horseback riding? When the boys gallantly sit out dances with me?"

Her aunt looked distressed. "But isn't it better than being way off on a farm in the country, seeing no one, never going anywhere?"

"In a way, yes; in other ways, no. At least up there I don't feel left out of things. I'm not a—a hindrance. No one has to exert himself to be nice to me or look after me."

"I can't *forbid* you to go," Mary Marshall said somewhat crossly. "If I could, I certainly would, but you're of age and have your own money and can do as you please. It does seem, though, that you might consider our wishes. If you'd stay around here, I'm sure you would see a lot of Stan, and you must admit he has been very attentive and thoughtful. You know how much in love he was with you at one time, and he probably would be again with some encouragement. I've never understood why you broke your engagement."

A little wearily, Marianna said, "You haven't? I've tried to make you see it, and the fact that Stan was so willing for me to break our engagement would seem to indicate it was the wise thing to do. And yes, Stan has been very nice to me these last few days, but the last time he took me out he was obviously bored. I've too much pride for that. And Stan doesn't want to marry me now. He wants a wife who can share things with him. No one can blame him for that. I think he'll marry Barbara."

"But, Marianna, a man wants more in a wife than just

someone to share sports and a good time with; he wants a wife who can meet his friends graciously, a cultured wife with the proper background for his children."

"Children?"

"There's no reason you can't have children."

"How do you know?" Marianna's voice was a little sharp.

"Because I asked the doctor."

"Dr. Randall?" Marianna asked tightly.

"Yes. There was nothing wrong with that."

"And I suppose you even told Stan that?" Marianna's face was flooded with color.

"As a matter of fact, I did, but it fitted very nicely into the conversation. And I wanted him to know. He said something one day that indicated to me he might have been thinking about it."

Marianna said bitterly, "And you wonder why I feel humiliated. Were you asking Stan to marry me in a subtle way? I'm sure Dr. Randall wondered why you should have asked him such a question—particularly when I have no intention of marrying anyone."

"I'm sure you don't mean that."

"But I do mean it. And even if I wanted to get married, who would I marry?"

"I've just told you. I think in a little while—if you stay here—Stan would—" She hesitated, and Marianna said with a shrug, "Would be willing?"

"Yes, if you want to put it that way. And there are other men. You're young, cultured, beautiful, rich—"

"And crippled," Marianna said. "You think those other things would offset that? No, thank you, Aunt Mary. I'm sure your intentions are the best, but no thank you. I'm going to have to work this out myself. And by myself, in my own way."

"Well, I'm sure I'm only trying to do what I think is best for you," her aunt said patiently.

"Then don't put obstacles in my way. I'm going back to stay with Uncle Bruce. For how long, I'm not sure. Someday—months from now maybe—I'll come back for a while. But I don't know. All that is in the future."

"Dr. Randall has made it quite plain to me that he is uncertain about an operation. He said there was no material change in those X-rays, and he's having some doctor—Dr. Correlli, I think the name is—look at them. You should at least wait until you know his opinion."

"Dr. Randall told me that in his opinion an operation might make it even worse. And it's a chance I'm not taking."

Marrianna saw Philip Randall once more before she went back to Hilltop. He came the morning before she left, and Marianna was sure that her aunt had asked him to. He said smilingly, "You're not going away this time without telling me where I can find you?"

"Why?"

"I don't want to lose touch with you. You're my favorite patient, you know."

"I needn't be a patient any longer, Doctor. I think you've already done all you can for me."

"That remains to be seen, and we don't want to stop trying. I want you to believe that you will walk again. That's half the battle, as I told you before."

"What's going to make me walk?"

"Faith, perhaps." The doctor smiled. "And nature will play a part, too. You're young, and you're strong and healthy. All that is in your favor."

"But isn't something wrong that has to be righted? Can nature take care of that?"

"It's possible—and then we're going to let Dr. Correlli decide about surgery."

"Oh no," Marianna corrected, "I think you're going to let *me* decide about it."

"Of course," he said soothingly, "but I'm sure you will at least talk to him." He smiled down into her eyes, and his voice became very gentle when he said, "Aside from your being my patient, Marianna, I like you very much, and I've enjoyed the time I've spent with you. I wish you would not go away again."

Looking into his eyes, so kind and considerate, Marianna was tempted to stay. Here, she would at least be where she would see Philip Randall. She wanted to be persuaded that his interest was not altogether professional, but knowing his reputation for philanthropy, she warned herself against becoming emotionally involved and decided that she would return to Hilltop. She did not tell the doctor where she was going other than to say that it wasn't far away. She wouldn't tell him even when he offered to drive her there himself, although her heart quivered at the suggestion.

Thinking it over the night before she left, Marianna said

to herself that she must dismiss all thoughts of Dr. Randall; otherwise, it would mean more heartache. He had said he was interested in her personally as well as professionally, but it couldn't mean anything in the end, so she might as well stifle all hope in the very beginning. It would be so easy to fall desperately in love with him. Not as she had been in love with Stan; she knew now that that had been only a superficial thing. With Philip Randall it would be deeply, irrevocably. She would not uselessly expose her heart to that.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Marianna arrived back at Hilltop in a heavy rainstorm. The old house seemed bleak and cheerless when she went in. The contrast with the home she had just left struck her forcibly, and she had to summon all her will power not to be dismayed. But there was no lacking in the warmth of her welcome. Everyone at Hilltop was glad to see her, Jock included. He stayed close beside her.

During the afternoon when she sat quietly with a book while Martha went about her duties and Uncle Bruce worked in his study, Marianna realized that she would have to get adjusted again to this country life. Perhaps if she had stayed at home, she would have become accustomed to her life there Was she treating Aunt Mary and Uncle Jack fairly? She had never known any other parents, and they had always been good to her. They did not understand why she wanted to leave home.

She was generally glad to get back to Hilltop. The roaring fires were cozy, and if the halls and some of the rooms were chilly, she didn't have to linger there. That familiar peace enveloped her here inside these old walls. She could not fully understand it It was something intangible, but she felt so safe here, so protected from hurts and humiliations.

She sat by the window, watching the trees bending furiously with the wind, watching the squalls sweep across the meadows, and was reminded of what Camellia had said—that she saw beauty in all kinds of weather and seasons. She had said she thought even the brown, bare fields held beauty, and the leafless trees against the winter sky. She saw beauty in nature even at its wildest, when clouds hung low and ominous and raced across the sky. Marianna was beginning to understand.

Perhaps it took days like this to make one really appreciate the beauty of spring in blossom such as Camellia had described here at Hilltop. She would see all that before long; the days would race away, and it would be spring before she realized it.

There would be no walk for her today in this weather.

The rain had stopped, and the temperature was dropping steadily. Soon the trees and bushes were encased in ice. It was soon an ice-covered world. So utterly beautiful and strange-looking.

Martha came in with a pot of steaming tea and a plate of cookies. She was going up to the barn now for her usual evening chores.

"I wish I could go," Marianna exclaimed. "It looks so beautiful outside, so wild and strange, like a postcard scene. Do you suppose I could if I were very careful?"

"Better not this time," Martha said kindly. "It's slippery, and ice is everywhere. Better stay here by the fire. I forgot to tell you that Dr. Livingston had a telephone put in while you were away. He's never cared about having one, but said he supposed it was just a cranky notion, not wanting people calling him, but he felt sure you would be back and that you would enjoy it. You can talk to home or your friends now whenever you want to."

Camellia Trent came in soon after Martha had gone out. She had some typing to deliver to Bruce, and had felt cooped up in the house all day. She had put on boots and had walked the mile along a country road. The boots were on the back porch caked with ice; she said she would bring them in the kitchen to thaw out before she started on her homeward journey.

"How glad I am to see you!" Marianna exclaimed. "Have tea? You must be half-frozen."

"I'm not at all cold; that is, except my face. I'm dressed warmly. No doubt I used poor judgment in getting out so late, but something impelled me to come. I had no idea ice would form so quickly. And I would like a cup of that tea; it smells delicious. I intended calling John to come over for me, but driving will be very hazardous. He'll think I've lost my mind. Did you have a nice Christmas?"

They were seated before the fire, the pot of tea and the cookies on a table between them.

Marianna looked into the fire and said vaguely, "Yes, I suppose I did. I went to a few parties, and there always seemed to be people at the house. My friends were all nice to me."

"You saw—what was his name? Stan? The man you were engaged to."

"Oh, yes, he took me out several times."

"Reviving old fires?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that. The fire, what little there was, has gone completely out. How was your Christmas?"

"Fine," Camellia said lightly. "They didn't tell you? I decided to ask Bruce, Martha, and Jim over for dinner. I cooked a big turkey with all the trimmings and several cakes. Martha brought a couple of pies also, and it was a white Christmas up here, and we all enjoyed it. I'm glad to report that some of my canine boarders found excellent homes, in fact seven of them, and I think I'll place two more Saturday." She settled herself comfortably, took a sip of the scalding tea, and said reminiscently, "One came to me on Christmas Eve, cold and shivering and hungry. I heard a whine outside, and when I opened the kitchen door, there he was, feebly wagging his tail. It must have been instinct that directed him. Somebody probably threw him away; people do that—just bring them out and dump them on the side of the road. I can't understand what sort of heart such people have. There's no telling how long that dog had been wandering in the cold I know he was very tired. I fed him a good supper and made him a bed in the greenhouse; the temperature is never low there. I decided I would not put him out in the kennels until daylight. He lay down very gratefully on the bed I put there for him, switching his tail in thanks. Of course he was just an animal, but it gave me a deep satisfaction. Some people might say I'm sentimental about animals, but I would rather be that way than the sort who throws animals away— It's getting dark out there. Perhaps I'd better telephone John to come for me right away."

"Since you're already here and it would be dark before he could get here, why not stay for dinner? You know you're always welcome. He could come for you later just as well."

Before Camellia could answer, a voice said cheerfully, "Why, hello there."

Dr. Livingston stood in the doorway. He sounded pleased. "I thought I'd come in and keep Marianna company, didn't want her to get too lonely on her first day back, so I'm glad you came over. You can take care of that better than I. I didn't see your car outside."

"I walked. I just had to get out and get some air, so I fed the animals early, bundled up, stepped into my boots, and came, thinking I would telephone John to drive over and get me."

"Now that you're here, you'll stay for dinner?"

"I've already asked her to stay," Marianna said, and Camellia said smilingly, "Well, it doesn't need much urging. I always enjoy having dinner here. I'd better telephone John, anyway. I'm so glad you had the telephone put in."

Martha came in carrying a basket of eggs and stopped in the doorway. "Do you know everything is coated with ice out there. I've never seen it freeze so quickly. I'm glad to see you, Camellia. Of course you're staying for dinner?"

"With three invitations, I can't refuse."

Dr. Livingston said, "As a matter of fact, why not tell John you're staying the night? No need for him to get out in this weather, and the roads will be more hazardous in the dark. I can run you over early in the morning."

Camellia said she believed she would, and after telephoning her brother, she went to the kitchen to see if she could help Martha.

When she had gone, Marianna said thoughtfully, "Isn't she a wonderful person?"

"She certainly is," her uncle agreed. "She's one in a million. She's one of the most selfless people I've ever known. I'm very fond of her."

Looking into the fire, Marianna said innocently, "And she's so attractive, too. I wonder why some man hasn't come up here and carried her off." She waited a moment and added, "Of course eventually some man will."

"I hope not," her uncle said promptly. "We couldn't do without Camellia."

"But you don't want to be selfish. She would make some man such a good wife."

Dr. Livingston looked at her curiously. "I hope you don't put any such idea into her head. I'm sure Camellia doesn't want to get married. She seems to have a full and happy life."

"Full of what? Work and loneliness and doing for others? Taking care of homeless animals, and visiting sick people at the hospital in the village? Do you think that's a full enough life for any woman?"

"Has she complained?" Bruce's voice sounded alarmed.

"Of course not. But she's human, and she must know she's missing something. And one of these days some man is going to come up here and carry her off. Then what will you do?"

"I can't imagine such a dire calamity," her uncle said,

smiling. Then he added, "I can't imagine Camellia not being over there. She's been my neighbor for years, and I couldn't get along without her."

"Then you'd better be doing something about it," Marianna said as Martha called them in to dinner. Glancing at her uncle, she saw that he was quite disturbed, that she had set him thinking. She had done that much for Camellia.

After dinner Bruce, Jim Fowler, and the two younger women played bridge, Martha sitting out to watch a favorite television program. The game went on comfortably, pleasantly, while the wind whined about the old house. Every now and then there was a sound of a limb breaking under its coating of ice.

When they were all comfortably sleepy, Martha said, "Camellia, I've had an electric heater in one of the bedrooms upstairs, as well as the fire Jim made, so it should be fairly comfortable by now, even though those rooms are really iceboxes. It takes a long time to get it warm, but you'll be in bed soon, anyway."

Camellia said, yawning, "I'd just as soon sleep in here on the sofa; it's so deliciously warm."

"My room is always warm," Marianna said. "If you like, you can come in with me."

"Oh, no, if you're used to sleeping alone, I might keep you awake."

Dr. Livingston solved it by putting a roll-away bed in Marianna's room so that they could visit before going to sleep.

Marianna was creaming her face some time later when Camellia said from between her blankets, "What were you and your uncle talking about so seriously just before dinner?"

Marianna looked at her through the mirror. "We were talking about you for a while. He said he didn't know what he would do without you."

"What brought that on?" Camellia asked curiously.

"I hope you don't mind," Marianna said. "I just reminded him of how attractive you are and that one of these days some man might come up here and take you off."

Camellia laughed. "Thanks for your good intentions, child, but Bruce Livingston knows I have few gentlemen friends. He knows there won't be any Prince Charming coming my way—not at this late date."

"No, he *doesn't* know that. Neither do you. It *could* hap-

pen. Didn't you tell me that young doctor down at the hospital had asked you several times if he might call?"

"Oh, *that*. His wife died about a year ago, and I suppose he gets lonely. He's fond of dogs, too, and is interested in my kennel."

"You should let him come up. He seemed nice."

"Oh, I told him he might come up someday."

"You could do that to wake Uncle Bruce up."

"He's known me a long time, Marianna. If he were to have any other regard for me than friendship, it would certainly have developed before now. I have no delusion about that."

"You're so matter-of-fact about everything," Marianna said without criticism. "You're so sure of yourself and complacent about things. If you'd just get moody sometimes, let him know that you have lonely days, or make him think you have them whether you do or not, he might feel differently. Maybe he's just scared of you. Do you mind my asking if you would marry him if he asked you?"

Camellia laughed, locked her hands behind her head, and regarded Marianna quizzically. Then she said, "Completely off the record, there hasn't been a time in years that I wouldn't have married Bruce if he had asked me. But I'm sure there is not the remotest chance of his ever doing that —not after all this time."

"What would your brother do without you?"

"He *could* do without me, but I don't think he would relish it much. However, he's quite fond of a young woman down in the village. She comes up to see us sometimes, and if I were out of the picture, he might get serious about her. As long as I'm around, though, he won't do anything about it."

"Well, if he—I mean Uncle Bruce—should hint around sometime, don't you discourage him."

"What shall I do?" Camellia seemed amused. Then she said more seriously, "Listen, honey, this thing has been going on for years—mine and Bruce's friendship, I mean—and frankly, I would rather have Bruce Livingston's friendship and companionship than the love of any other man. So don't you worry about me, and for heaven's sake, don't let him know that we've had this conversation."

Long after Camellia had fallen asleep, Marianna was still awake. She was restless tonight even though she was glad to be back here in her comfortable bed in this quiet old

farmhouse. She raised the shade, and saw that the skies had cleared. There was a full moon shining down on the ice-coated trees and bushes, giving everything a strange, eerie beauty.

What were they doing at home now? Here she was in bed at ten o'clock, and her crowd probably were just starting out to some affair. She would be asleep for hours before they came in. They were dancing somewhere, of course. What was Philip Randall doing? Was he at the hospital, or perhaps somewhere with a companion? Who would it be? A mental flash brought to her the way he had looked down into her eyes that last day and said that he liked her. Would he ever say that to her again? Would she see him again? And when? Would she be carrying a torch for him when she was thirty-six, as Camellia was doing for Uncle Bruce?

Bruce took Camellia home the next morning almost as soon as it was light. The sky was paling into opalescent dawn, and the lovely greenish-gold morning star was hanging in the eastern sky.

Martha was up and stirring about before they were dressed and had coffee ready for them. It was clear and cold. Ice clung to the trees and shrubs, and as the sun came over the horizon everything glittered with a coating of gold. The beauty was breath-taking.

The car took the icy ruts without difficulty. Smoke was curling from the chimneys when they reached Shadowlawn.

"I'd like to ask you something, Camellia," Bruce said just before they reached the house. At her inquiring glance he said, "Are you happy, Camellia?"

"Happy?" she repeated, looking at him. "Perhaps content would be a better word."

"Then you *are* content?"

"Why do you ask?" Her eyes moved over his face, her heart beating fast.

"You always seem so well adjusted, but I just got to wondering. You're not thinking of going away, are you?"

"Not today, anyway," Camellia laughed, then added frankly, "Where would I go?"

"I don't know. Marianna seemed to think—at least she said something last night about your wasting your life waiting on other people. You don't feel that way, do you, Camellia?"

"I don't feel that way at all," Camellia said practically.

"I'm too busy to indulge in any day-dreaming and might-have-been's."

"Well," Bruce said, "what Marianna said upset me. Because I don't like to think of your going away from here. I don't know what we'd do without you."

"Well, I have no plans," Camellia said, "so you can put your mind at rest."

"You would tell me, wouldn't you? I mean, if you ever decide to go away?" He sounded so earnest, so distressed that Camellia laughed and said lightly, "Oh, forget it, Bruce. I'm not going anywhere. I'll probably be typing your manuscripts when I'm getting around with a cane. Won't you come in and have more coffee?"

Bruce said no, that he knew how many early morning tasks confronted her.

"Well, thanks for the lift," she said, "and I really enjoyed spending the night at Hilltop."

When he had driven away, Camellia stood a moment looking after the car. *How stupid can men get?* she thought. So he would miss her, would he? He couldn't do without her; he took her so for granted. But he wasn't in the least in love with her. She was glad she had carried it off so lightly. But she had hidden her love so long, it wasn't hard. She was sure that he did not suspect how she felt about him. Perhaps she was just plain stupid not to let him know; it might be better not to guard her secret so closely.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Glenda said, "Bill, will you do something for me?"

They were drinking coffee in the hospital restaurant.

Bill grinned. "You know I'll do anything you ask short of murder. What is it?"

"Find out where Marianna Marshall is."

"Why?"

"Dr. Randall wants to know."

"Why does he want to know?"

"Well, you know that ever since Dr. Correlli saw those X-rays, he's been in favor of surgery. That's what the Chief wants to talk to her about."

"Can't he find out from her aunt?"

"No. It seems Marianna doesn't want anyone to know, and her aunt humors her."

"I think that's pretty darn silly, if you ask me," Bill said in disgust. "Why shouldn't she want anyone to know? And after all, he's her doctor; he should be told."

"I'm sure I don't know, but he says Mrs. Marshall has refused to tell him, and until Marianna agrees, she won't. Even Stanley Webster doesn't know. He said he hadn't even tried to find out, that if Marianna wanted him to know where she was, she would tell him herself. He really didn't seem much concerned or interested. I suppose he's gotten over her."

"And you're seeing Stan Webster these days?"

"Not in the way you mean, no. Stanley Webster isn't interested in any girl not in the social register."

"It doesn't bother you that the Chief is so anxious to find her?" Bill grinned derisively.

"If it did, do you think I would be trying to find out where she is for him? Frankly, I do believe he has a romantic interest in her; at least, he likes her very much, although I don't see how he can be interested in a social butterfly."

"She isn't a social butterfly any more, you know. And after all, Marianna is very beautiful."

"Maybe being crippled doesn't mean as much to a doctor as it would to some men. Anyway, he wants to know, and he's depending on me to find out."

"What is he going to do when he does find out? Go after her?"

"I didn't ask him that. All I'm interested in is getting the information for him."

"Do you think he would marry her?"

Glenda said drily, "That isn't his purpose in trying to find her; of that I'm sure, and that's all the interest I have in it. I don't really think Dr. Randall will ever marry anyone. But I can say this. Knowing him, if he were in love with Marianna, her being lame wouldn't keep him from marrying her."

Bill said accusingly, "You were with him last night."

Glenda sighed. "Do I always have to explain to you, Bill, everywhere I go and with whom? He operated, and I was there to help. When we were free, he suggested that we go out and get a bite of supper since neither of us had had any. He's used to me, is comfortable around me, and he knows he has to make no apologies for having to bring me home early. And that he's safe with me because *I* won't be trying to lead him to the altar."

"How does he know that?"

"Because he thinks I'm in love with you."

"Why don't you tell him differently?" Bill shrugged.

"Well"—Glenda paused, met his eyes, and looked down demurely—"maybe I am. I know I get very jealous when you date someone else."

"But you're not in love with me enough to marry me."

"I like my profession, Bill, and you wouldn't want me to keep working."

"You're darn right, I wouldn't. I see enough of the hospital, hear enough hospital talk during the day, and I don't want to take it home with me. And I darn sure don't want to take Dr. Philip Randall home with me. If so many women are in love with him, how come you're immune?"

She looked at him a moment, then said, "I don't know, Bill, unless it's because you got in the way."

"Don't say things like that; don't look at me like that where I can't kiss you."

"You can wait until tonight," Glenda said serenely. "We can continue this discussion then. And you will try to find out where Marianna is?"

"I wouldn't know where to start, but I'll do my best."

"Do you know her maid Celeste when you see her?"

"Yes, but I never see her. I know Jacques the chauffeur,

too, but I'd hardly have any reason for engaging either of them in conversation."

"I'll leave it with you to get results. It's possible her aunt might tell you; she always seemed to like you. She said once that if all doctors were as cheerful as you are, patients would get well quicker."

Being of a determined nature, Bill went to call on Marianna's aunt.

When she came into the living room, where he was waiting, she said pleasantly, "How nice of you to come, Dr. Drake. When the maid announced you, I thought, 'That's strange, he must know that Marianna is away,' but I'm glad to see you, anyway."

"Yes, I know she's away." Bill smiled disarmingly. "We're all so interested in Marianna, and we're distressed that she's gone away where we don't know how to find her. Dr. Randall is especially concerned. I'm sure he has told you what Dr. Correlli thinks of those last X-rays and that he feels surgery may help."

"Yes, I know, and I'm thinking of going to see Marianna and telling her about it. She should come back and at least talk to Dr. Correlli. But I promised I would tell no one where she is, and I can't break that promise. She's so sensitive about her lameness."

"But if she would come back and submit to this surgery, she might not be lame. If you could persuade her of that—"

"I don't think I can, but I'm going to try."

"Which brings me to the purpose of my visit, but I don't suppose you would feel justified in breaking your promise even for her own good. I came to see if you would tell me where she is."

"Wait until I have a chance to talk to her again; then we'll see. Sometimes she acts so strange, it doesn't seem that she even *wants* to get well."

"Don't you think that's because she dares not hope? Because if she does have the surgery and it's unsuccessful, her despair would be greater than ever."

"You're probably right, but it's a chance I think I would take under the same circumstances."

"When you talk to her, will you let us know?"

"If I can persuade her to come home, I'll tell you, or if she'll give me permission to tell Dr. Randall her whereabouts."

"She told Dr. Randall she would not be far away, that your chauffeur was driving her there that day."

"That's right, it isn't far."

Bill stayed an hour, and they talked the situation over at length, but when he left, he knew no more of where Marianna was than he knew when he came.

He reported his visit to Glenda, and when she told Dr. Randall about it, he said thoughtfully, "If I could only remember something. When she first told me of her decision to go away, I recall she said the decision was sudden—that someone, some relative, came to see her and she thought she would go to stay with him for a while. I could ask Mrs. Marshall sometime who it was that came to see her just before she went away, and in that way I might be able to trace her."

Glenda said hesitantly, "Doctor, you're so anxious to locate her. Do you really believe that surgery will cure her?"

"Correlli says there's a chance. I'm not going to advise her one way or the other. But we do want to find her and talk to her. Show her these last X-rays and let Correlli explain to her why he thinks it may help. Then it's up to her to decide. And I want to talk to Marianna about a number of things."

Glenda said a bit timidly, "I suppose it's temerity on my part and that I shouldn't ask, but I'm going to. Are you in love with her, Doctor?"

Dr Randall waited a moment before replying, and Glenda wondered if she had offended him with her frankness. He moved some things around on his desk, then looked up with a smile and said, "I—I'm not quite sure, Glenda. I only know that she affects me strangely; I can't seem to get her out of my mind. I like to be with her. I was in love once when I was very young. The girl married someone else, and since that time I've steered clear of romance. Marianna reminds me of the girl I was in love with—perhaps that's the basis of my interest. And too, there was something pathetic about Marianna; she lost so much all at one time. Granted that hers has always been a shallow sort of life, it was all she had, and when she lost everything, she didn't have the courage to face it. There's something about her I can't explain." He stopped helplessly, and Glenda said softly, "Of course you can't. No one can explain that something that makes one person different from all others. She doesn't know how you feel about her?"

"I haven't told her, if that's what you mean. Sometimes I think a girl does know. Intuition tells her."

"Her aunt, Mrs. Marshall, is going to try to get her to come back home to talk with Dr. Correlli. Perhaps you should tell her then."

"I'll probably never tell her," Dr. Randall said, "and by and by I'll forget it. At least it won't torment me as it does now. I'll just have to leave it all to the future."

Glenda ventured timidly, "Well—I—I'm sorry, Doctor"

"Oh, don't worry about me." Dr. Randall said briskly "As you know, I have a very full life I have no time for regrets or wishful thinking. Now let's go to see number seven. I'm a little uneasy about that case."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

For Marianna the days raced by timelessly. Her life was so changed that she felt sometimes as if she had a new identity. She did not feel at all like the girl she used to be.

It was a bitterly cold winter on the hill, with snow all through February Even in March, some of the days were leaden with snow flurries whirling around; other days were clear and bright and cold.

Marianna managed to get out of doors for a while every day, sometimes going with Martha to the barn, sometimes with Uncle Bruce on his walk. She felt no stronger, did not believe she was any better physically; in fact, there were times in the coldest weather when her hip was a steady dull ache, but she never complained. Mentally, she was more at peace; the moods of despair came less often, and she did not have the dark thoughts she formerly had.

She had reached the place where she did not mind helping Martha with any task of which she was physically capable. She would sit in the warm kitchen in the big cushioned chair Martha kept there for her and peel apples or potatoes, wheel herself to the table and make a salad under Martha's direction. She had come to enjoy such simple tasks and was very proud of the cake she made one day even though Martha had directed her every step of the way.

Camellia had given her an instruction book, and her uncle had bought another electric typewriter, and Marianna spent long, tedious hours learning to type. She was slow, but very accurate, and wrote many letters for Uncle Bruce. And she read many books, one after the other; there was a plentiful supply here in the library. And her uncle subscribed to many magazines. She was never in need of reading material.

The four in the household played bridge at night, and often Camellia came over for a game and sometimes spent the night. She and Marianna had become very close friends. And Marianna spent some time at Shadowlawn. She had become interested in Camellia's kennel and was always thrilled when one of the inmates found a good home. She went with Camellia sometimes to the village, visited the sick in the hos-

pital, and often met Camellia's friend, Dr. Stephen Gray. It was easy to see what he thought of Camellia.

Marianna learned much about nature and the habits of animals and birds. She began to put out food each morning for the birds, and learned from Martha that she had done this in the winter all the time she had been at Hilltop. It was interesting to see them sitting perched on the bare limbs of the trees in the early mornings waiting for their food, and as soon as it was strewn about, they flew down and began eating hungrily. They seemed wholly unafraid and often crowded around her feet.

She became acquainted with the elements. She liked the wild, windy days when the sun played hide-and-seek among the fast-moving clouds. She liked the whirling snow and exulted in getting out into it. And she liked the bright, windless, cold days and would sometimes go outside, well-wrapped, and sit on the southside of the house for hours in the sun.

Her aunt had written her weeks ago and told her about Dr. Correlli, but she had not wanted to go down, and so Dr. Correlli had gone home and nothing more had been said about surgery for her. She did promise her aunt that she would come home for a visit soon, but she kept putting it off.

And then finally the cold was gone and spring came to Hilltop.

Fields were plowed, gardens planted, and the beauty was unfolding day by day as the peach, pear, and apple trees put forth their blossoms, the dogwood and mountain laurel burst out. The ground around the old house was a sea of daffodils, narcissi, and hyacinths, and wisteria climbed to the rooftops. The sun was a warm mantle over everything. Marianna found it impossible to stay indoors.

Camellia came for her often on such days, and they enjoyed long rides in the country, both collies prancing about on the back seat. And they would stop sometimes at a tea-room for lunch. It was all simple and pleasant, and Marianna had begun even to accept her crutch without feeling.

She had never told her aunt there was now a telephone at Hilltop. When she talked to her at first, she had used Camellia's telephone, and her aunt, assuming she was still using it whenever she called, never phoned her. But there were many letters. The first ones had been filled with activities of her crowd, and one letter some time ago had told of a visit from Bill Drake, wanting her address, saying he wanted

it for Dr. Randall. Marianna still would not give her aunt permission to disclose her whereabouts. She didn't know just why she did this, other than that she felt she was better off here than there, and each time she thought of Philip Randall and the way he had looked at her that last day, her heart ached. If she should go back where she would see him often, it would be worse. She would wait a while longer. Time was a healing factor, people said.

She was sorry she had not been able to further the romance between Camellia and Uncle Bruce, or rather to awaken him to the possibility of a romance. Camellia still faithfully did his typing and was his friend and companion for long hours, but she said she had closed her heart now to any hope that he might reciprocate her feeling. Seemingly, she was content.

Uncle Bruce talked often of a trip he was contemplating around the world. He had made it several times and was ready to go again. He lectured in many faraway places, on various subjects. He liked the remote spots of civilization and was gone sometimes a full year. He had been at Hilltop longer this time than ever before. Marianna suspected that her presence there now delayed his going, and she had insisted that she could stay on with Jim and Martha Fowler and that he must feel free to go whenever he chose. She said to Camellia once, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if Uncle Bruce would wake up and see what he's missing by not taking you along on that trip?" She knew by Camellia's expression that the same thought had come to her. Camellia was pensive for a few moments, then she said, "If that could be, I don't think I would want any other paradise." And Marianna thought, *How wonderful—or how terrible—it must be to love a man like that.* She had no intention of letting her own heart get involved to that extent. Love wasn't for her, and she would not let herself be hurt. And then she laughed at herself for such thoughts. She needn't be thinking of running from love, because love would never again cross her path. She was sure of that.

One summer day Marianna sat in her chair in the shade of the big elm, taking in the beauty of the golden day, strangely at peace with herself and the world. A bird sang from a nearby tree, and from far off came the sound of guineas. She used to think it the lonesomest thing in the world, hearing them on dismal, rainy days, but today she didn't mind. Jock lay at her feet, a vagrant breeze ruffling

his long hair. He was almost always with her now, and Marianna adored him.

She heard a car coming up the lane that led from the highway. She knew Uncle Bruce was writing, and she knew the sound of Camellia's old Buick, so she knew this must be a stranger. And soon she saw a light blue and cream late-model car as it stopped on the other side of the big entrance gates. She saw a vaguely familiar figure get out, come around, and open the big swinging gates, then drive the car through And she saw that he was not alone. A girl was with him. Jock had stood up, watchfully alert, and she laid a hand on his back, knowing that he scented strangers. He would quietly lie down at her command, or if she ordered it, he would hold the visitors at bay.

Recognition dawned. The man was Dr. Bill Drake. Then she recognized the girl as Glenda Carlson. She was glad to see them, but only partly. She wanted no one intruding on her privacy. But she had no time to further analyze her emotions, for Bill was getting out of the car, coming round to open the door for Glenda. He did not see Marianna there under the trees until Glenda stood beside him.

They walked toward her together. "Hi!" Bill called cheerily, as though he had seen her yesterday. He could not be at all sure of their welcome, but his voice was gay when he said, "We thought we would come up to see you."

Glenda came around to her chair. "Hello there, how are you, Marianna? We're so glad to find you. What a wonderful place; everything is so beautiful and mellowed-looking. You're looking wonderful, and what a gorgeous dog you have."

Marianna said graciously, "I'm glad to see you, too, but how on earth did you know where to find me? Won't you sit down?"

They took chairs close by, and Glenda glanced meaningfully at Bill. He said, "I hope you'll forgive us for intruding, and it goes without saying that if we didn't think a lot of you, we wouldn't be here. Believe it or not, we've been doing a lot of worrying about you. Your Aunt Mary said not to, that you seemed well satisfied and were getting along fine, but we wanted to come and see for ourselves." He was leaning forward a little, his hands clasped between his knees, his eyes darting here and there on the beauty of the surroundings. His voice was light; his eyes and smile were friendly.

"Did my aunt tell you where I was?"

"She did not," Bill assured her. "I practically bribed her, but she was adamant. She said she had promised you not to tell until you gave her permission."

"Does anyone else know? I mean, you haven't told my friends at home?"

"We've told no one," Glenda said. "We thought it was your affair and decided we would drive up to see you, not telling anyone where we were going. We've been trying a long time to find out where you were. I must say, you've found a charming spot. I like this place."

"I like it, too," Marianna said. "It hasn't all the conveniences, and back in the winter we were snowed in for days. We had some wild, stormy weather, but I didn't mind; in fact, I rather liked it."

"I can easily believe you like it. You really look wonderful. Now tell her, Bill, how we found out. I think you should."

Bill smiled, inched his chair forward a little, and said, "Well, it was like this. You once said to Dr. Randall that some relative came to see you and that you might go and stay with him for a while. I talked to your aunt a number of times, and in an ingenious way I learned that the only close relative you had was an uncle. Then Glenda talked to Stanley Webster and asked him if he knew your uncle, and Stan said he didn't know him, but that everybody had heard of him. He was a noted writer, a scientist, by the name of Dr. Bruce Livingston. After that, it wasn't hard. We began to inquire around about a man by that name, and it didn't take us long to find out about him and where he lived. It was as simple as that. And now we're here, and I hope you're not angry that we found out."

Marianna laughed. "No, I'm not angry. I suppose I should be pleased that anyone was that interested in me. And it's nice to see you both. I'm sure it wasn't just curiosity that brought you."

"Not at all. It was interest, not curiosity. Dr. Randall has wanted to talk to you. He wanted to tell you what Dr. Correlli thought of those last X-rays."

"I know," Marianna said. "Aunt Mary told me. She wanted me to come back then, but somehow—well, to tell the truth, I suppose I was afraid. I suppose I didn't have the courage to face the possibility of further disappointment. And strange as it may seem, I've learned to live with my affliction, and it doesn't seem as bad here as it does at home. I

can get about quite well now, and I do many things I've never done before. You see, I don't feel awkward here about using my crutch."

The doctor and nurse exchanged glances again, and as before, Bill spoke. "They say a person can eventually get used to anything. And I'm glad that you feel better about it, but if there's a good chance of your being as you used to be, I'm sure you would like that better than the life you're leading here. And so we came to ask if you would see Dr. Randall, let him talk to you about it. He can get Dr. Correlli back any time he says the word."

A shadow crossed Marianna's face. She asked quietly, "Why didn't he come and ask me himself?"

"Because he doesn't know where you are. He doesn't know about our coming. Since we found out your hideaway as we did, we didn't feel we should tell anyone without your permission, although he asked Glenda some time back to try to find you. So we came to ask you, and I hope you'll either go back with us or let us take word back that you'll come and talk to him and to Dr. Correlli. As to surgery, the decision would still be yours, but I think Randall feels that if they can show you their reasons for feeling an operation would help, you would be willing."

Before Marianna could comment on that, she saw Bruce Livingston coming around the house, and she called to him to come and meet her friends.

Shaking Bruce Livingston's hand, Bill said, "I've heard of you, sir, and it's a privilege to meet you, Dr. Livingston."

Bruce Livingston shook his head and said, "Thanks, but I'm a very ordinary person. I don't have a lot of contact with the outside world now, and I'm rarely called Doctor in our village here." He shook hands with Glenda Carlson, and when they were all seated, he said, "I've always felt that only medical men should be called doctors, a term to distinguish them from any other profession, although it was originally used as a general term for teachers, distinguished teachers, I mean."

"You are a scientist?" Glenda asked.

He hesitated, and Marianna supplied, "Uncle Bruce is modest. He hesitates to tell you that he has a doctorate in science, philosophy, entomology, and perhaps still other things. He's a writer, too. Uncle Bruce is a *very* smart man, and I've learned so much from him these past months."

They all laughed at Marianna's earnestness, and Bruce

Livingston said, "Perhaps my niece is prejudiced. She would make a good press agent."

Marianna explained then the purpose of the visitors' coming to Hilltop and how they had found her, and her uncle listened attentively, his eyes moving around the group.

"What do you think, Dr. Livingston?" Glenda shot the question at him. "I mean, don't you feel that Marianna should go back and at least talk to this Dr. Correlli?"

Dr. Livingston said mildly, "Of course that would seem to be the sensible course to follow. Still, I think the decision is entirely with Marianna; I mean, she should do just as she wants to about it. What do you think, Doctor?" His eyes went to Bill.

Dr. Drake said he had talked with Dr. Correlli and he had seen the pictures and that Dr. Randall had explained what Dr. Correlli wanted to do. And he added, "If Randall is in favor of it, that goes for me too. I trust him implicitly."

Turning to Marianna, her uncle asked, "What do you think, Marianna? Do you want to go back and discuss it with these doctors?"

"I'm thinking it out," Marianna said. "I didn't want to go a while back when Aunt Mary told me about it. I suppose I'm a coward and dread disappointment. I know that *something* holds me back, and if it isn't that, I don't know what it is. I've gotten used to myself as I am now, and how do I know that an operation might not make it worse?"

Bill said reluctantly, "Well, of course, I think Dr. Correlli admits there is that possibility."

Marianna's uncle said, "Then it's just a chance."

"I believe that's right."

"Then of course Marianna should decide whether she wants to take that chance, with no persuasion from others. I think the decision must be hers alone."

Bill said then, "Won't you get ready, Marianna, and go back with us? You can decide there at home as well as you can here. And Dr. Randall will be there to talk it over with you."

Marianna said no, she would not do that; she would think it over here and get in touch with them in a few days.

That settled it for them all, and Bruce Livingston went inside to see about refreshments. Martha served lime sherbet and her special pound cake. The visitors were invited to lunch, but said they must be leaving, that Glenda had to go on duty in late afternoon and had a long drive back.

Glenda said, "When I have the time, I'd like to come up and spend the day and go over this farm. I must have had country ancestors, because I've always liked farms and big barns and farm animals."

Dr. Livingston said he would be glad to show her the farm and that he hoped she would come again soon, and indeed to spend the day. They spent another hour, and Dr. Livingston proved himself an interesting talker, with his wide knowledge of many subjects. The young people were very much impressed with the older man and liked his friendliness and cordiality.

As they were driving away, Glenda said to Bill, "Have you ever seen anything like it?"

"Like what?" he asked.

"Marianna Marshall. She isn't the same girl at all."

"She's changed, all right," Bill agreed. "I never thought I would see her accepting her affliction so philosophically. She would never have taken that attitude if she had stayed at home."

"I do think being there has helped her, mentally and physically. It seems to be such a quiet, restful place, and association with a man like Bruce Livingston must be inspirational. I would relish a vacation in that spot. I wonder if Dr. Livingston is married. I suppose not, since a Mrs. Livingston didn't show up."

"That shouldn't concern you," Bill retorted.

"I remember now," Glenda said musingly, paying no attention to Bill's remark. "I remember Stanley Webster said he was at one time and his wife died and he's sort of a hermit. It's a shame for an attractive man like that to hide himself away."

"Don't you go getting ideas."

"Bill, are you jealous of every man I speak to?"

"Yep," Bill admitted frankly. "And you just forget about other men and concentrate on me."

Glenda shrugged. "Getting back to the purpose of our visit, do you think she will consent to surgery?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. I don't think she's at all sold on the idea, but if she comes down and Dr. Randall talks to her, he may be able to get her around to a different viewpoint. There must be a telephone there; I didn't think to ask. But if we don't hear from her in a couple of days, you try to call her."

"She didn't suggest calling or say that she would call us and let us know anything," Glenda said.

"The strange thing to me is that she seems so well satisfied. I mean so much more so than before her accident."

"Well, remember, Bill, we didn't really know her then."

"We knew her by reputation. She was supposed to be high-hat, snooty, and condescending She isn't that way now."

Glenda agreed and added that she was going to enjoy telling Dr. Randall that they had seen Marianna.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"What do you think I should do about it, Uncle Bruce?"

Marianna and her uncle were lingering at the table while Martha cleared away.

Soft, fragrant night air came through the opened windows, and there was the sound of locusts, crickets, and other little night creatures.

Dr Livingston said carefully, "As I said before, Marianna, that is something you should decide for yourself. I should think it would depend partly on how much confidence you have in your doctor—this Dr. Randall. You can at least talk it over with him."

"In a way, I hate it," Marianna said. "I mean, going back to the hospital, everyone talking— It means that I would take up just where I left off."

"But if the operation is a success," Dr. Livingston pointed out, "you can really take up where you left off. You can erase this interval at Hilltop as though it had never been."

"I don't want to erase it, Uncle Bruce. Being up here, the peace and solitude and quietness, even the loneliness—I think it's done something important to me. I'm not the same person I was before I came. I—I've changed. Can't you see it?"

"Of course I can see it." Her uncle's eyes moved over her face. "I see it, but I wasn't sure that you did. Remember the conversation we had about the different stages of the butterfly? I think you've evolved from those early stages to something much finer than you were. As you say, peace, nature, solitude—those things do something for a person."

"Perhaps that is why I don't want to go back and be as I was before my accident. I was a pretty smug girl, Uncle Bruce. I can see it now, where I couldn't then. As Stan once expressed it, I thought all the presents on the Christmas tree should be for me, or at least that I might take whatever I wanted."

"And you don't have that feeling now?"

"No. No one knows what I've been through mentally; it was really a sort of Gethsemane for me, and I'm a better person. I'm just wondering if I *would* revert to what I was before if I could walk again. Do you think I would, Uncle Bruce?"

"No one can answer that but yourself."

"That's just it. I don't know. I wouldn't want to be like that again."

"Do you mean you don't want to leave Hilltop?"

"I don't want to go away for all time. You don't know—you *can't* know, no one can—the private hell I went through just before I came up here. No one knows the tortured thoughts, the sleepless nights, the despair. But I lived through it, and I kept my sanity. I don't want all that suffering to have happened for nothing. I've adjusted my life since I've been up here. I don't want to go back to feeling as I did before I came."

"I'm glad it has helped you. I was sure it would, although I'll confess now I didn't expect you to stay. Sometimes we find that simple things are best." He was silent a moment, then smiled and said, "Perhaps you should look at it this way. If you had the courage to go ahead with your life feeling that you would always be lame, maybe you should have the courage to go back and face it all again, a chance to be made well and then decide what you want to do with the future. See how much will power you have. Isn't it a kind of a challenge?"

"I suppose you're right. But if I should have this operation and it's successful and I walk again, would it mean I wouldn't be coming back to Hilltop?"

"You can always come back to Hilltop whenever you wish as long as you live. This is as much your home now as the one you've always known."

"Thank you, Uncle Bruce. It seems impossible that anyone could get so attached to a place in a few months. But I mean—I mean—" She paused, having difficulty in expressing herself. "I mean, would it change me so that I wouldn't *want* to come back? I don't think it would, but how do I *know*?"

"Do you think it might?"

"I don't know," Marianna said honestly. "That's what puzzles me. The way I feel now, I don't think I would ever want to be my old self again, but there's that possibility."

"And you don't want to take that chance?"

"I—I'm not sure. As I said, I can see so much about myself before my accident that wasn't admirable."

"And you feel that if you were again as you were, you might marry the fellow you were engaged to?"

"Oh, no," Marianna said promptly. "I'm sure I would

never consider that again. After knowing you—and Dr. Randall, I can see so many flaws in Stan. And I wouldn't want to marry a man who wouldn't stand by me in trouble."

"But I thought *you* broke your engagement."

"I did. But he made it easy for me to do it. I think I was really hoping in a vague way that he would insist on going ahead with the wedding. I'm not sure I would have done it, but if he had loved me enough, I think he would have suggested it. And even if I were well again, he probably would not want to marry me. Aunt Mary thinks he's now engaged to one of my friends, Barbara Wayne. She was to have been in our wedding."

"And you don't care?"

"Not in the least. Stan seems almost a stranger to me—someone I knew a long time ago."

"That's good. I'm glad you're not unhappy about him. I thought perhaps when you first came to Hilltop that you were. Getting back to this surgery, I suppose the sensible thing to do would be to go back and at least talk to these doctors, let them explain it all to you and show you why they think it will help. Then it might be easier for you to decide what you want to do about it. You can come back any time you wish."

Marianna said seriously. "There's one thing I want to know. Are you putting off your trip on my account?"

He did not answer immediately, and in the pause Marianna said, "Because if you are, I'll go and not come back. I don't want to interfere with your life. There is no reason, is there, why I shouldn't stay on here with Martha and Jim if I want to?"

"No reason at all. They would care for you adequately. But there's a question in my mind as to whether I should leave you here. Hilltop is such an isolated spot, as you have found out."

"That doesn't matter, if you're speaking of the loneliness. And regardless of what I decide, I hope you'll go ahead with your plans."

"As a matter of fact, I'm not quite ready to go yet. The thought has come to me that you might like to go along."

"Go around the world with you!" Marianna exclaimed.

"I see no reason you shouldn't if you want to."

Marianna had a fleeting glimpse of far-away places, of ships and glittering waves on shimmering sea, of soft rugs on big steamer chairs, of orchestras playing and moonlit

decks. Of quaint, foreign lands, little dining places, magnificent scenery. But it was only fleeting. She said quickly, "I would only handicap you. It would be wonderful, but I would be a hindrance to you in everything you wanted to do. You'll be meeting interesting people, going to important places, and I would just be in the way."

"I don't think you would be, but the trip might be too much for you physically. You would get more out of it, of course, if you could get about normally, and I was thinking I could postpone the trip until you decide about the operation. Then if you have it and it's successful, we can talk about it again." He smiled, then added, "I'll confess it sounds more interesting, the thought of having a companion along."

Martha came in and said, "If you all are going to set there talking all night, I'll just leave the rest of the things on the table until morning."

Marianna, not even hearing her, said, "You could take Camellia along."

"Hardly. Not without causing a great deal of scandal."

"Not necessarily. You could marry her."

Dr. Livingston looked at his niece a moment without speaking. Then he said, "Camellia wouldn't marry me, honey. I don't think she would marry anybody. You subtly suggested something like that around Christmastime, but if I were to say anything like that to Camellia, she would think I had lost my mind, and it might spoil a beautiful friendship."

"Do you like her enough to marry her?"

"I'm extremely fond of Camellia, as I told you before. I suppose I like her more than any woman I've known for a long time. She exemplifies everything that is sweet, loyal, and sincere. She's a jewel."

"You wouldn't like to see her marry anyone else, would you?"

"It would leave me utterly desolate."

"Then I think you should know that there is a doctor down at the hospital in the village, Dr. Stephen Gray, who likes her very much and comes to Shadowlawn to see her."

She saw that he was surprised, and she went on. "He came up there one day not long ago while I was there. I could tell that he likes her, and I think she likes him, too. One of these days she might decide that she's tired of living alone. She's not old, and she's definitely attractive."

"I know Dr. Gray. His wife died a little over a year ago. He's a fine man, and if Camellia loves him, it might be a good

thing for her. Still"—he moved things about on the table—"I don't like to think of such a thing. I don't think she's considering anything like that. She didn't talk as though she was when we had the conversation at Christmastime."

"But that's months ago. Lots can happen in that length of time. Maybe he wasn't coming to Shadowlawn that long ago."

"Does he come often?"

"I think so. She says little about it, but every now and then his name creeps into the conversation. You know what that usually means with a woman."

"I'll try to make it my business to find out what she thinks of him."

Marianna smiled at the decisiveness in his voice, then cautioned, "You shouldn't wait too long."

"Think she likes him?"

"Likes?" Marianna repeated. "I know she likes him."

"In love with him, would you say?"

"I don't think so—not yet. But she easily might be. He's a charming person, near her age, and seems devoted to her." She looked at Bruce sidewise, noted his disturbed expression, and added, "But of course she would first have to get over being in love with you."

"What! Where did you get such a fantastic idea? She's just like part of my family." There was a new note of sharpness in his voice.

"Why don't you try to find out? I don't believe Dr. Gray will lose much time courting her. He seems quite determined." Marianna knew she was drawing a little on her imagination, but she went on. "You would make such a distinguished-looking couple, you and Camellia, and you seem so right for each other. She's so interested in your work. I don't understand why you didn't fall in love with her long ago."

"I wonder," Dr. Livingston said musingly. "Maybe I am in love with her. Maybe I am and just don't know it. Love—it seems something for young people; maybe that's why I haven't recognized it."

"Well, stars above, you aren't old. Neither is she. And think how much more interesting all those places you're going would be with her by your side, sharing them."

"You almost persuade me." Bruce Livingston smiled "Give me some time to get used to the idea. I still think that if I should go over there with anything like that on my mind,

Camellia would be hunting around for her thermometer to see if I have a temperature."

"Well, I've opened your eyes," Marianna said carelessly. "And I'll add that I think she's been in love with you a long time."

"She didn't say anything to indicate anything like that, did she?" he asked hopefully.

"A woman has intuition about such things," Marianna said evasively.

Dr. Livingston said lightly, "Look at that clock. We've been talking here a long time. If we're going to play any bridge tonight, we'd better get started."

After an hour of bridge with Martha and Jim, Dr. Livingston said he believed he'd get out and take a short stroll before going to bed. He did not ask Marianna to go along.

He walked out into the clear, moon-washed night. The night creatures were still chirping, and there was a mantle of silver over the world. It was warm tonight, but a vagrant breeze stirred. The air was fragrant from the many flowers, and as Bruce Livingston walked about, he idly touched a blossom here and there.

Thinking that Camellia might marry Dr. Stephen Gray gave him a queer, strangled feeling. Why had he been so blind? He realized now that he had been in love with Camellia for a very long time. The days when he saw her were bright ones, and if a few went by and he did not see her, he grew restless and went to Shadowlawn just to look into her clear brown eyes, just to hear the music of her well-modulated voice.

His feelings suddenly grew so intense that he could not wait until tomorrow. If he did, something might change his mind. He would go to see her now. The decision was suddenly there without his seeming to have made up his mind. He would ask Camellia Trent to marry him.

It was after eleven o'clock when he stopped his car in Camellia's driveway. The lights were still on, and he knew they had not retired. He had passed a car just before he got to the gates of Shadowlawn and surmised it was a visitor leaving.

Hearing Bruce's car stop, Camellia stepped out on the porch, wondering who could be coming at this hour, or if Dr. Gray was returning for something.

To Bruce Livingston she looked very lovely standing in the moonlight looking at him as he got out of the car.

"Bruce!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Has something happened?"

"Yes." He came up the steps, not taking his eyes off her. "Whose car was that I saw leaving?"

"Dr. Gray's. Why?"

"Anybody sick?"

"No, Bruce, nobody's sick. Dr. Gray came to call."

"On you?"

"Of course. Is that so incomprehensible?" Camellia was suddenly exasperated. "All men are not like you, Bruce. Some of them are made of flesh and blood, they're human. But what happened to bring you over so late?"

Dr. Livingston took a deep breath. "I suppose because I've found that I'm like those other men I guess this should be handled with a great deal more finesse, but I seem to have lost that sort of thing along the way."

"What sort of thing?" Camellia asked. Her heart started beating rapidly, but she was wholly and utterly unprepared for his next words.

"I came over tonight to tell you that I'm in love with you and want you to marry me."

"Oh, Bruce!" Camellia sat down on the porch railing and started laughing. Hearing that from Bruce Livingston after all these years was just too startling and unreal.

Bruce said defensively, "I told Marianna you'd laugh about it, but you can take time to think it over, because I'm not going to change my mind."

Camellia stood up, facing him. There were tears in her eyes when she said, "Oh, you dear idiot! I'm not laughing at you. I was half expecting scolding over some error I might have made in your work, and to have it something so entirely different— Of course I had no idea you felt this way." There was deep happiness in her voice.

"I hadn't either, until tonight, although I suppose I've really been in love with you all along. It doesn't shock you too much, does it?"

Camellia smiled into his eyes. "You're a very smart man, Bruce Livingston, about everything, but so dumb about women. Don't you know, my darling, that I've been waiting for—for years—to hear you say that? I've been in love with you almost ever since I met you."

He gathered her close in his arms as he said, "I don't see why you didn't find some way to let me know. We've wasted so much time. But there's a bright future before us now."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Camellia found Marianna lying in the hammock in the shade. It was another golden summer day, not too warm, with butterflies and bees seeking nectar from the flowers.

Seeing her approach the hammock, Marianna thought Camellia looked ten years younger. Camellia wore a soft blue sleeveless cotton frock, and her hair was tied back with a blue ribbon. Her legs were bare and brown, and her arms showed a golden tan. Marianna had a sudden feeling that she was the older; certainly, there was a vitality and zest about Camellia that was lacking in herself.

Camellia spoke first: "I suppose Bruce told you?"

"Yes, he told us at breakfast this morning. I'm so glad, Camellia. It seems so right. And if he hadn't told us, I think I would have known that something wonderful happened by the way you look."

"I do feel wonderful," Camellia admitted. "I'm unbelievably happy. I seem to have been in a trance ever since last night, hardly daring to believe it's so. My only concern is John; I'm sure he is glad for me, but right now he's feeling lost. I told him we had made no plans and wouldn't be making any right away. And I reminded him that it was time he was looking for a companion for himself. He'll probably not wait long if Madge Evans has her way. What I want to know, honey, is what part you had in all this. I'm sure you had something to do with Bruce waking up."

Marianna put her sunglasses on, locked her hands behind her head, and said, "I told him Dr. Gray had been coming up frequently and let him believe that he was coming with a proposal on his lips."

"You didn't exaggerate," Camellia said, "because that's just what happened last night. Dr. Gray did ask me to marry him; he was just leaving as Bruce came."

"And you turned him down?"

"Yes. I told him that I had been in love with another man for a very long time, and he knew immediately who it was."

"And now you'll take the trip around the world with Uncle

Bruce," Marianna said. "Camellia, don't let him put it off on my account."

"He isn't going to do that. We've talked about it. He just isn't quite ready to go yet. And there's plenty of time. We're both concerned now over this pending operation of yours. I don't like to advise in a case like this, Marianna, but I do feel that you should go down and talk to the doctors. Think what a difference it would make in your life if you could walk again."

"I've gotten so content and lazy. I like my life here, and I don't want to be a social butterfly again."

"You don't have to be just because you can walk again. Bruce wants me to go down with you, and I told him I would if you wanted me to."

"I'm still trying to make up my mind," Marianna said slowly. "I can't explain exactly how I feel about it. Of course I want to walk again without my crutch—that goes without saying—but something holds me back. Perhaps because I want it so badly I won't risk the chance of the operation being a failure. I'll decide in the next day or so, and if I do go down, of course I'd like to have you go along Aunt Mary will be glad to have you. I've told her lots about you Shall I tell her about you and Uncle Bruce, or is it to be a secret for the present?"

"Heavens no, why should it be a secret? In fact, I don't think it's been any secret to anyone how I feel, except to Bruce himself. But I don't care, I'm going down to the village now to get Madge Evans to come up and spend the day. She isn't exactly my type, but John likes her, so it's all right with me."

"Matchmaker!" Marianna smiled.

"You're a fine one to make that accusation," Camellia said happily. "I have an idea if you'd never come to Hilltop, I would never be Mrs. Bruce Livingston."

"I don't know. I rather think that perhaps when Uncle Bruce found out about Dr. Gray, he would have awakened."

"And now about you. When will you go home?"

"I'll have to let you know when I decide. The plan might be for me to go to Mayo's and have Dr. Correlli do the work there. He's a surgeon with an international reputation."

"You're lucky to have him interested."

"He's an old friend of Dr. Randall's. And then, haven't you learned that money talks? I'm sure this will cost a small fortune."

"Money not only talks, it yells," Camellia agreed, laughing "But whatever it costs, in this case it would be worth it and a great deal more if he can make you walk again."

Camellia had been gone for some time, and Marianna was drowsing in the hammock. The sun shone down like liquid gold, and the day was growing warmer, but it was cool there in the dense shade. There was practically always a breeze on Hilltop.

Jock, lying beside her chair, roused himself and gave several deep staccato barks. Not the sort of bark with which he greeted those he knew. Marianna sat up, swung her feet to the ground to see if someone was coming. Then she saw the car, and her heart gave a great lurch. She recognized the light blue Cadillac. She saw Dr. Randall get out He left the car on the other side of the gate and walked toward the house. He had not seen her, but at another bark from Jock, he turned his eyes in her direction. She could only sit still as he came toward her and did not attempt to rise in greeting.

She quieted the collie, and when Dr. Randall was near enough, she said, "Hello," and extended her hand.

"My dear." He took her hand and held it. There was deep gladness in his voice. "You don't know how glad I am to see you. You're looking extremely well."

"I feel wonderful." Marianna's heart sang as he pulled a chair nearer the hammock and said, "This is a beautiful dog; what is his name?"

"Jock. Down, Jock. Don't let him put his feet on you."

The doctor absently patted the dog's head, then, looking directly at Marianna for a moment, said, "I couldn't wait for you to come down after Bill and Glenda told me about seeing you. I had to see for myself if things were as well with you as they reported."

"They promised, or it seems they did, that they wouldn't tell anyone where I was."

"They've told no one but me. Since you half promised to come back and talk with us, they felt that they could." His eyes moved over the grounds. "This is a wonderful old place."

"I've enjoyed it," Marianna said serenely, conscious of a deep thrill each time his eyes looked into hers. "I think it's done something for me."

"I can see that. You positively radiate good health and contentment."

"I liked it even when the winter snows came, when it was windy and cold and we had big fires. We have no central heating here and burn huge logs in the fireplaces. The peace and tranquility here have made me a different person."

He said, "This is a delightful spot, but I'd like to take you somewhere in my car. I want to talk to you. Do you feel like going?"

Marianna looked down at her linen pedal pushers and sleeveless blouse. "Yes, but I should go inside and dress first."

"You look all right to me as you are."

Marianna glanced at her watch. "Could we come back here for lunch? I'm sure my uncle would like to meet you."

"Bill told me about him, and I'd like to meet him, too, but suppose we drive around and find some spot somewhere and eat. Shall I drive the car through the gateway for you?"

Marianna said she didn't mind walking the distance to the car. She got up with alacrity before he could offer to help, and he noticed that she didn't mind the crutch as she had before. He was really surprised at her agility. She explained that she took a walk every day.

He walked along with her while she went to tell Martha she was going out with Dr. Randall, and Martha immediately suggested that they come back for lunch.

"We'll pick up lunch somewhere while we're out," the doctor said. "Thanks, but I have only limited time."

Martha said to Marianna, "You don't want to come in and slip on a dress?"

"She's all right," the doctor smiled. "She looks to be about fourteen years old."

"Martha, tell Uncle Bruce we've gone and that when we come back, I want him to meet Dr. Randall."

Dr. Randall drove aimlessly over the country roads surrounding Hilltop, and down into the village, where Marianna pointed out the hospital, the different churches and schools. It was a quaint-looking town with clean-looking homes and tidy lawns, in a picturesque setting at the foot of the big hills that came right to the town's edge. Marianna suggested a little dining room she and Camellia had found at the edge of the lake just outside the town, and she di-

rected Dr. Randall there. There was a screened porch with tables fronting the lake, and the forest crowded close.

When their dinner had been served, he started talking to her about Dr. Correlli and what he thought of her injury and why he thought surgery might help.

Marianna listened, her eyes dark and serious, more interested in his smile and the way he looked at her than in what he was saying. He said he would take her to Dr. Correlli if she wished, or he might be able to prevail on the doctor to do the work at Walker.

"It isn't a surety of course," he explained, "but the chance is worth taking." He was very earnest, and when he paused, she said, "What do you think, Dr. Randall? I mean personally. Heretofore you were against surgery, you know."

"That's right, I was. There was nothing at the time to indicate it would do any good. As Bill explained to you, there have been certain changes—the X-rays showed that. That's the reason I asked Dr. Correlli to look at them."

"What would the operation consist of?"

"Well, it seems there's a complicated misplacement of the hipbone as well as some spinal trouble. It's hard to explain to a nonmedical person, but you can be sure that a man like Correlli would not even suggest surgery if he wasn't fairly certain that it would be successful."

"But he hasn't said that I *will* walk again?"

"Not definitely, no. It's a chance and a hope. But a good chance. It's a long, tedious process, involving some bone grafting; you would be hospitalized a long time. The decision is up to you."

"But I'm asking *you* whether I should?"

"I'm not going to advise you. I think the choice should be entirely your own. Of course it would be worth any amount of pain and inconvenience to be able to walk again as you did before your accident."

"I'm not thinking of the pain and inconvenience particularly," Marianna said. "Perhaps it's the possibility of disappointment. There's no guarantee the operation would be a success."

"Correlli pointed that out, but it's a chance, as I said before. Think what it would mean to you, Marianna, if it *was* successful. After all, you don't want to spend the rest of your life in virtual isolation. Granted that you have enjoyed the time you have spent up there at Hilltop, would you enjoy years and years of it? Would you like to grow old doing

the same things, with no more companionship than you have there?"

The waiter came then to take their order, and when he was gone, she said in a low, clear voice, "I don't know. I haven't thought that far ahead. I only know that I've gotten a satisfaction there that I never found before. Books and fires, long winter days of leisure, helping Martha with simple tasks and learning about the farm—it has made me come alive inside; it's shown me how useless my life was before."

"I can understand that. As I pointed out to you once before, the merry-go-round of pleasure has never attracted me, and I know how unrewarding such a life can be. But while good books, fires, music, and sunsets have their place, you're young, you want more than that. You want to *live* before you grow old."

"How do you mean?" Marianna's glance left his face, and watched the ducks swimming on the lake, watched the shadows come and go there as the sun went under clouds and then out again.

"I mean the normal life for a woman, of course. Love—it's hard for a woman to live without it. Love, a home, a good man, children."

"I haven't thought about those things lately."

Their lunch came, other diners took nearby tables, and it was later when they were driving back to Hilltop that he brought up the subject again.

"You said you hadn't thought of marriage lately, but there's no reason you shouldn't."

Marianna laughed lightly. "Well, I think I should wait until after my operation—if I have it—before I get to thinking about romance. Wait until I see whether I can walk again."

"What has walking to do with it?"

"Everything. Even if I should—should ever fall in love again, no man wants a crippled woman for a wife."

He pulled to the side of the road and stopped the car. Then he reached a hand over, turned her face toward him, and said gently, "Will you marry me, Marianna?"

Startled, not believing her ears, Marianna gasped and said promptly, "Of course not."

"That was certainly quick enough." He smiled. "And it shows you didn't even take the time to give it any consideration."

"Why should you ask me to marry you, Dr. Randall?"

"For the same reason most other men ask women to marry

them. Because I'm in love with you. Didn't you know?"

"No," Marianna said in a low voice, "I didn't know. And I don't believe it now. I think you're just sorry for me." Her voice was not steady.

"If you'll come back home, give me a chance to be around you more, I believe I can convince you. It's true. I would have told you long before now if you hadn't gone away."

Marianna was trembling. She knew she could be very deeply in love with this man if she would let herself be. But she still could not rid herself of the conviction that it was pity he felt for her, not love. She said wonderingly, "Do you mean that you would marry me now, even before you know whether I will walk again or not?"

"I'll marry you any time you'll agree," he said. "Do you remember that I once told you I wanted to meet you long before you had your accident? That I was sorry when I learned that you were already engaged? I would have met you sooner or later and might have changed your mind."

A little bitterly Marianna said, "I've heard that you could have any woman you wanted. Why would you choose me?"

"Why does anybody choose a certain person? Won't you even think about it, Marianna? You see, I didn't wait until after your operation to ask you—that should prove whether I love you or not."

She said pensively, "If this could have happened before my accident, if I'd had a chance to be with you, I'm sure I would have fallen in love with you. I've always admired you very much." She still would not let him know how much she cared.

"Then you'll think about it? Because I'm not going to give up easily; I love you too much."

Marianna closed her eyes to keep the tears from spilling over. She was badly shaken and seemed unable to think clearly. It seemed so wonderful, yet so impossible that Philip Randall was in love with her and wanted to marry her, a girl who had to walk with a crutch.

He said, "I'm going to kiss you good-by now. And then we'll go on to the house and I'll meet your uncle. But I want you to promise me you'll come back. You will, won't you?"

"I—I think I will," Marianna said.

His arm went around her, drew her close; he turned her face toward him and kissed her lips. "We'll go now; I must be getting back soon. And I'll be thinking of you every minute of every day."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Marianna walked down the lane toward the barn as the westering sun lay slantingly over the orchards and meadow. She wanted to think this thing out and decide what she must do about it.

It had been a week now since Philip Randall's visit to the farm, and she had talked to him over the telephone several times. He had been in touch with Dr. Correlli again, and the plan was to bring her to the Mayo Clinic. Marianna wondered uneasily at times whether it would be better to do as Dr. Randall had first suggested: let nature take its course. He had been of the opinion in the beginning that nature and time might effect a cure. Did she want to wait longer with that hope?

She experienced a deep thrill whenever she thought of Philip Randall, of his saying he loved her, of his desire to marry her. But did she want to marry him in her present state? She had tried to convince him that it would be a great handicap to him, and she had never let him know just how she really felt about him. He had been satisfied to wait until she came home where, he had said, he would see her every day and they would make plans. Marianna realized that the best thing probably was to go home and stay there for a while, talk it all over with Aunt Mary and Uncle Jack, and then, in a more rational frame of mind, come to some decision. She had been in the clouds since Philip Randall came to Hilltop.

She had gotten as far in her walk as the big gates that led into the meadow. There were daisies there, bobbing their heads in the breeze, and the meadow was bathed with a golden glow. There was a wide path winding through the meadow, and she suddenly decided she would walk that way. She felt stronger and was not at all tired. She looked around for Jock, but he was nowhere in sight.

Her thoughts kept going around in circles as she walked. Aunt Mary had reported that Stan had been over, that he had talked with Glenda Carlson and she had told him about the plan for surgery. He was very enthusiastic and said he

hoped Marianna would soon return. Her aunt said she did not think he was engaged to Barbara; evidently that had been a false rumor and she was sure that everything being all right, Stan would be agreeable to picking up where he and Marianna had left off.

Marianna's mouth curled in scorn. Had her aunt no pride? "Everything being all right" of course meant that if the operation was a success. Then Stan would be willing to marry her. Her romance with Stan seemed so long ago. She had no interest now in marrying him and wondered how she could ever have had. She didn't like to think it of Stan, but several times she had wondered if his interest in Barbara Wayne stemmed from the fact that Barbara's parents were very wealthy and Barbara was an only child. Stan's folks were comfortably well off, but her aunt had told her of rumors to the effect that the Webster fortune was somewhat shaky; there had been some bad business ventures and ill-advised investments. Could it be that Stan's revival of interest in her was because he knew that she was very rich in her own right? Money had never meant much to her, probably because she had never known the need of it, but she thought of it now. Stan might be thinking of it, too. At any rate, she was not interested, and she brushed the thought of Stan away impatiently.

She stopped and looked back; she had gone much farther than she had intended, and it was quite a way back to the big gates. She was a little tired and warm and had not realized it until this moment. But there was no need to hurry. She could sit down here on a bed of daisies and rest and then make her way back slowly. She turned and surveyed the horizon; the fields stretched away endlessly, it seemed. The old house looked homey and attractive in the distance. She felt a great affection for it, for the ancient trees, the gardens. There was an air of tranquility over everything.

She heard a distant cowbell, sounding lonely in the stillness, and realized that this meadow adjoined the pasture lands where the cows were kept. Occasionally the palominos were let in here, but never the cows. That is why she noticed so quickly a lone cow standing still, as though etched against the horizon. Some of the bars must have been down, or a gate must have been left open. While she pondered it, she heard an ominous sound and saw that the beast was moving. She recalled she had heard Jim Fowler telling Un-

cle Bruce about the new Holstein bull he had just purchased and that he had a nasty disposition.

The low, rumbling noise came again, and Marianna stood petrified with terror. The animal was coming toward her. It was the bull Jim had bought. She started as fast as she could manage on the crutch toward the big gates, but even as she did so, there came a loud bellow and she saw that the bull had started running, shaking his head and pawing the ground.

It's too far, she thought despairingly, *I'll never make it!* But she kept struggling, knowing the animal was gaining steadily. Panic lent her strength, and she hobbled on, trying to take long steps, but she was not used to the pace, and the crutch wobbled and fell from her grasp. She started hopping on her right leg, but that was useless. She tried her left leg, and a searing pain shot through her hip But she forced herself onward, making both her legs obey, making her left foot touch the ground again and again. With each step the pain seemed more and more unbearable.

She had no coherent thoughts; they were all intermingled with terror. It was hopeless now, the gates were still several yards away, and she could hear the bull's feet tearing into the earth, and even if she might miraculously reach the gate, there would be no time to unlatch it. But the bottom bar cleared the ground by at least a foot and a half, if there were only time to get there, she might roll under.

Her breath was coming in sobs, and her face was wet with tears, and the pain in her hip and back was unbearable. She was incapable of speech, could not cry out.

With the last vestige of hope gone, and feeling the animal only a few yards behind her, she saw a big furry body sail over the fence. It was Jock, and as soon as his feet touched the ground, he charged the bull, attracting its attention, barking vociferously, making wide circles around the animal. In the seconds that followed, Marianna ran forward three more steps, then threw herself on the ground and rolled under the gate, where she lay panting. She was safe now, thanks to that glorious collie, unless the bull's strength could knock the gate down. She lay spent, wondering what would happen, while Jock continued his frantic barking.

Just as she fainted and consciousness left her, she heard voices and the sound of running feet. Jim and the hired man

had heard the barking dog and came running around the barn, just in time to see the big bull paw the earth a few times, throw his head into the air, and trot angrily away, routed by the charging collie. The dog crawled under the fence and lay panting heavily beside Marianna.

Martha, too, had seen from her kitchen, and she and Dr. Livingston came on the run.

Dr. Livingston said when they reached Marianna, "A second more and it would have been too late." His voice shook, and beads of sweat stood on his face.

"That wonderful dog!" Martha exclaimed. "If it hadn't been for Jock she would never have made it. It was just those few seconds that meant the difference between life and death."

Dr. Livingston stooped and picked Marianna up in his arms. "She's unconscious and may be badly hurt. Martha, go telephone for Dr. Gray and tell him to come up right away. And, Jim, shoot that bull or take it back or do whatever you want to with it. I won't have it on the place."

Martha sat beside Marianna's bed, waiting for Dr. Gray. He had said he would come immediately. Marianna awakened crying and gasping, reliving her terrible experience, and Martha sought to calm her, saying over and over, "You're all right now, Marianna. Don't worry, just try to rest. The doctor will be here soon."

Her uncle also talked to her soothingly, but Marianna still seemed unable to talk coherently; occasionally there would come a shudder, or a gasp of pain.

Dr. Gray stayed almost an hour. He gave her a thorough examination and said he could find no bodily injuries but that she was in a mild state of shock. He told them to see that she was kept quiet, left some pills for the pain in her leg, which he said had undergone a terrific strain, and said he would come back tomorrow.

It was late when Marianna awakened. She felt groggy and drowsy and was not inclined to talk. The doctor had said to keep her quiet, so they did not ask her how she felt. She asked for a drink of water, said she did not want dinner, and was almost immediately asleep again.

She awakened quite early in the morning. Sunlight was coming through the opened windows, and she heard birds singing. She felt fairly comfortable except for a dull ache in her back. Everything about the house seemed very quiet.

She was not reliving her experience as she had earlier, and her mind was now quite clear and she could remember just what had happened. She remembered the doctor being here, remembered them talking about the collie, and about disposing of the bull. What would have happened if it hadn't been for the collie? She would have been gored; she would have been dead by now. Life, the early morning sunshine, the sweetness of the early morning air, were very precious, the more so because she had very nearly lost them. How on earth had she ever made her way back after she heard that bellowing bull? She remembered that she had lost her crutch. It stood there by her bed now; someone had found it and brought it back. Did the others know that she had made her way for several yards without the use of it? How had she done that? It was of course a gesture of self-preservation, superhuman strength born of desperation. Her life had hung in the balance, and she had summoned the strength to make her way. She remembered the excruciating pain when the foot of her lame leg had first touched the ground. It was like a knife, or a red hot spear, but her life had depended on somehow getting along, and she had not stopped for the crutch. She had hopped along and limped, knowing now that she had cried out from the pain.

She sat on the side of the bed and put her feet on the floor. Her left leg felt different somehow; there was an ache, but the leg did not feel as weak and useless as it had. Holding to the bed, she stood up on her right foot and started to reach for the crutch, and while she did so her other foot touched the floor. There was another stab of pain, but she was standing on both feet. Sheer hysteria took possession of her, and she sat down weakly and cried. She could balance herself; she could stand on both feet. After a few moments she got up and tried it again, ignoring the pain. This time she took a couple of steps and her leg did not give way. But it was learning to walk all over again, learning just as a baby had to learn.

What had happened? Dr. Randall had said once that in time she might be as sound as ever. Had the *something* happened that Dr. Correlli was going to try to cure with surgery? Had the violent strain she had put upon it effected a cure? Dr. Randall had said something like that *could* happen.

She waited several minutes, then, still ignoring the pain or discomfort, managed to take several steps and was finally

across the room, panting and with beads of perspiration on her face, but also a look of infinite gladness.

Dr. Gray was coming back this morning. Perhaps she should ask him about it before she continued trying to walk; she might be doing the wrong thing.

But how wonderful it would be to walk again without the surgery. And how happy everyone would be. Already she had a feeling of elation. No one who had not had the experience could know how wonderful it was to take steps unaided. Did she dare try to make her way to the kitchen alone? She glanced at her watch. Were they eating breakfast now? Did she dare try to surprise them? So great was her relief that the little pain that accompanied her efforts meant nothing. She would stand much more pain than that to be able to walk normally again.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Marianna had been at home for several days before she permitted her aunt to tell her friends that she was there. She had telephoned to Dr. Randall before leaving Hilltop to tell him that she would be down in a few days but to make no arrangements for her until after she arrived and talked to him. She made no mention of the miracle that had happened to her. She brought along with her a number of X-rays that Dr. Gray had made; he wanted her to show them to Dr. Randall and compare them with those he had made previously, in order for him to determine from a medical standpoint just what happened to her when she forced herself to try to walk. She walked now, anywhere she wanted to go, but Dr. Gray advised against strain and immoderation. Sometimes there was a little limp, just a small hesitation, but she managed to get along adequately and so far had felt no strain.

Aunt Mary wanted to give a reception for her, to surprise her friends with her good fortune, and Marianna was so happy that she willingly fell in with the plan. Aunt Mary said they would buy the most attractive dress they could find for the reception, and in order to guard her secret, she had a number of dresses sent out from exclusive shops so that Marianna could try them on at home.

Several times Marianna had reached for the telephone to call Dr. Randall, but she was not quite ready. She had decided she would ask him to come early before the reception so she could see him before the other guests began to arrive.

Because Marianna was so happy over the miracle that had happened to her, her aunt thought she was happy to be at home again. Marianna had given that little thought. Uncle Bruce had brought her down, saying that he hoped she would soon return to Hilltop. He and Camellia would be married in a short time and start on their trip around the world, and if she shouldn't come back before then, they would be looking for her as soon as they returned. In the

meantime, she could of course come up and stay with Martha and Jim Fowler as long as she liked.

Of course it *was* pleasant being at home among her own familiar things, knowing that in a little while she would be driving her own car around again, taking up life where she left off. Dr. Gray had said he saw no reason why she should not resume her horseback riding and that in a short time she might dance again, but he advised her not to hurry it. She intended to talk all that over with Dr. Randall, but now, it was just glorious to be alive again, to walk around, up and downstairs, out into the sunlight to sit on the patio, asking help of no one.

When she called Dr. Randall and told him she was there and that a number of people were coming to the party and that she wanted him to come early, he did not understand her lilting voice and the happiness it contained, nor the occasion for the party. She did not say that she had been there several days, and he got the impression she had just come. There was some quality in her voice he did not understand, something elusive as though she had withdrawn to a distance. She had seemed so close the last time he had see her.

Marianna gave Glenda and Dr. Drake a belated invitation to the reception, knowing that if she had told them beforehand, Glenda might come to see her, and she would tell Dr. Randall. Glenda had asked her what she had decided about the surgery, and Marianna said she would tell Dr. Randall.

"I hope you decided in favor of it," Glenda had said. "Dr. Randall has been fuming and fussing ever since he saw you up there at Hilltop, waiting for you to make up your mind."

Marianna's dress was white. It had a full swirling skirt with brilliants like stars peeping through. It was waltz length, and her white satin slippers had rhinestone heels.

She was standing at the window alone when the butler showed Dr. Randall into the softly lighted library, and she turned when she heard him enter the room.

"Marianna!" He came toward her with outstretched hands, not immediately noting the absence of her crutch. "My dear, you look so beautiful, there's such a sparkle in your eyes. Has something nice happened?"

She gave him her hands and stood there looking up into his eyes. "Haven't you noticed?"

He was looking at her face so closely, noting the long upswept curling lashes, the shadowed eyes, and the beautiful mouth, that he still was unprepared for her turning around in front of him, saying, "It's the dress. It sparkles."

He stood back looking at her a moment, then in an incredulous voice exclaimed, "Marianna! You're standing without your crutch. Where is it?"

She walked away from him then a little way and stood there smiling.

"I don't believe it!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe what I am seeing!" He followed her and stood before her. "What on earth has happened, my darling? Why haven't you told me?"

"Come over here and sit down," she said then, leading the way to the sofa, walking steadily without the slightest limp.

They sat down with him still holding her hand. She stretched out the foot before her, smiled, and said, "It's as good as new, Doctor. I wanted to surprise you."

"You've certainly done that. This is the most amazing thing I've ever heard of. When I saw you only a few weeks ago, you were not walking at all. Tell me about it."

So she told him all about the day she was chased by the bull, of the almost unbearable pain she endured, and then the miracle of awakening the next morning to find that she could stand alone and could walk. It had improved steadily, until now she had scarcely no trouble and little pain.

She laughed when she finished, and said, "Uncle Bruce had the bull taken away immediately, but I can't help having a sort of soft spot in my heart for him. If he hadn't chased me, if I hadn't made that superhuman effort—"

Philip Randall had never seen Marianna as she was tonight; he did not know her at all. So happy, so carefree. He was of course thrilled that she was walking again, but he found himself missing the wistful, dependent girl that had been Marianna; he felt a little withdrawn from this happy, carefree woman.

He found himself saying with a professional touch, "I'll get in touch with Dr. Correlli tonight and tell him. He's waiting to know our plans. I'm sure he'll be utterly dumbfounded, although he has told me about a case very much like yours in which an accident effected a cure."

Marianna's eyes moved over his face wonderingly as she

said, "You don't seem—seem as happy for me as—as you should be, Doctor."

"Of course I'm happy for you," he said immediately. "I know of nothing that could have made me happier. I've just got to adjust to you as you are now."

Mary Marshall came in then, and the conversation became general. Asked what he thought of what had happened to Marianna, Philip Randall went into medical facts and some technicalities until Marianna said, "Oh, let's don't talk about it any more; just let me forget it."

Many friends came to call that night. They were overwhelmed with astonishment to find Marianna standing there with her aunt receiving the guests. They swept her right back into her old place as though she had never been away, marveling at the miracle that had restored her to them. They had forgotten all those months they had neglected her, those days when she was at home and they had not tried very hard to make her feel one of them. Things were different now; they knew that she would again be a leader; it would not do at all to be snubbed by Marianna Marshall.

Stan was showing her devoted attention, making it so marked that there were many comments about it. She knew that if she wanted it that way, she could again become engaged to him, that she could have the brilliant wedding now that had been planned a year ago. Was she being carried along on a current too strong for her?

She would not let her thoughts go beyond tonight. She was friendly to all, endeavoring to devote a part of her time to each of her guests. But her eyes moved restlessly over the room seeking Philip Randall. She would see him standing with a group, usually older people, listening intently, or endeavoring to explain just what had happened to Marianna.

Marianna had time for no further conversation with him all evening, although a number of times she purposely moved near to him, but it seemed that each time he was talking to others. She began to have a feeling of neglect. Was it as she had once surmised, long ago, when she had said to herself that his interest was professional only and that if she were well again, he would have no further interest in her? But what about that day he had come to Hilltop? What about his telling her he loved her, wanted to marry her? Had he changed his mind? Had her failure to keep in touch with him, to contact him right away and let him know about her

cure, offended him? Surely, she thought, before the evening was over, he would come and talk to her again. But she must laugh and be gay, she had no time for brooding—and she was too happy tonight to brood over anything. She felt everything would be all right, he would come tomorrow or call her.

Stan suggested a horseback ride in the park in the early morning, and several others seconded it. Could Marianna ride now? Yes, Marianna said, of course she could. She promised she would be ready at eight o'clock and, yes, she would be glad to go somewhere for breakfast later.

And presently they were all saying good-by, Dr. Randall among them. His good night to her was no different than when he said good night to her aunt. He did not ask if he could remain and see her for a little while, nor did he suggest a meeting tomorrow or say that he would call. He held her hand a long moment and said only, "Believe me, child, I'm very, very happy for you. I'm sure you know that."

It all seemed flat somehow, and she was conscious of a little sorrow. She was not as happy as she had been earlier in the evening.

Uncle Bruce and Camellia had come for the reception tonight, and Marianna thought her aunt might have asked Dr. Randall to stay awhile with them after the others had gone, but the thought probably had not occurred to her. She was sure Aunt Mary thought Dr. Randall had no interest but a professional one in her.

They sat around the table talking after the guests had all gone, Aunt Mary, Uncle Jack, Camellia, and Uncle Bruce, and Celeste brought in black coffee. They were talking the evening over. Aunt Mary said casually, "I do think Stanley Webster is the most fascinating young man, and from all appearances he is still in love with Marianna. Isn't that so, Marianna?"

"I don't know," Marianna answered, in a voice that sounded tired.

"I think you do," Aunt Mary said. "You only have to snap your finger to get him back. I wouldn't be surprised if we don't have wedding bells around here yet—just as we planned before."

Marianna's voice was a little sharp when she said, "Don't count on it. I assure you I have nothing like that on my mind now."

Uncle Jack spoke up. "Stan is a very fine young man, and he seems devoted to you."

"Yes, he's been very devoted to me these past months. As you both know, he hasn't known I was living."

"But, darling," her aunt said, "you'll remember you would let us tell no one where you were. Stan did ask several times."

She would not argue about it further. This, her first time back in her old life, was not as happy an occasion as she had anticipated. Maybe she would just have to grow into it again. No matter, she would just let it take its own course. And presently, after a few months, it might be just as it was before she went away And with that thought there came a feeling of panic She had left that life once long ago, and she thought she had found something better; she did not want to return to it again.

Uncle Bruce and Camellia were driving back to Hilltop tonight. It would take them several hours, but there was a full moon and they said they preferred to go back, that each had duties to attend to Seeing them leave, Marianna had an impulse to ask them to take her along. She really wanted to go, wanted to sleep in that big canopied bed in her big square room, with the collie on the floor nearby. To awaken to the sound of birds and to go out to the old kitchen and have breakfast at the little table with the red-checkered cloth, to help Martha, and to find her retreat in the hammock in the shade of the big trees. But if she voiced such thoughts aloud, it would displease her uncle and aunt Now that she was well again, they had made it very plain that they thought her home was with them, that she should stay here now. There seemed no need to humor her further.

Marianna went to bed that night with a strange heartache and no enthusiasm whatever for the ride tomorrow morning with Stan.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"Hi, there!"

Martha Fowler looked up to see Marianna standing there at the kitchen door.

There was blank astonishment on her face, and for a moment she was speechless.

"Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Am I!" Martha exclaimed happily. "That is an understatement if I ever heard one. Why didn't you let us know you were coming? You sure look well; that blue dress is most becoming on you. Come in; it's just about lunchtime. Alone?"

Marianna nodded.

"You drive that?" Marianna's white Cadillac was parked near the back door.

"It doesn't bother me to drive; in fact, I can do just about everything I ever could except dance. The doctor told me to wait a while for that."

Marianna went into the cool, airy house. Everything was clean and spotless and homey-looking.

She sat down at the kitchen table, and Martha gave her a Coca-Cola, saying again, "My, child, I'm glad you're back; I've really missed you."

"I'm really glad to be back, too," Marianna said on a little sigh.

"Going to stay for a while?"

"I'm going to stay a week. My Aunt Mary and Uncle Jack are taking a long trip, around the world, probably, and of course they're planning it for me. I knew I just had to come up again before I left. Camellia and Uncle Bruce are planning to be married right away, aren't they?"

"Land sakes, yes; I think they're planning to be married very quietly. They've been poring over travel folders every day." Her eyes moved over Marianna's face. "You're happy, aren't you, Marianna?"

Marianna sipped the Coke and looked out the window. "You'll remember, Martha, I said once that if I could only walk again without that crutch, I would never complain or

be unhappy again. I'm trying to remember that. And yes, I'd say that I'm happy; I've made up my mind to be. I think I'll ride over to Camellia's; can't you go along with me?"

"My stars, no, I haven't the time. I've got to get on with my pear preserves. I've canned quarts and quarts of peaches and berries, and now it's time for pears. But you go along; Camellia will be glad to see you. Jock, let her alone. You'll just have to make him get out of the way. Dr. Livingston says he supposes you'll just have to take him home with you; he's always hunting around for you."

"He wouldn't be happy there," Marianna said, rubbing the dog's silky ear. "There would be no place for him to run and play, and then Jim needs him with the sheep, doesn't he?"

"Are you worrying about anything, Marianna?" Martha asked irrelevantly.

"No," Marianna said immediately. "I suppose I'm just going through another adjustment. I can't get up much enthusiasm over this trip Aunt Mary is planning, but I suppose the nearer the time comes, I'll be more interested. And when we get back—it will be months, and it will be cold weather up here again—but when we get back, I'm going to come up here and stay with you awhile if it's all right."

"Of course, it's all right. You can come back and stay the rest of your life if you want to."

Marianna went to Shadowlawn after she had had lunch. She found Camellia sorting her clothes, packing away things for storage. She was overjoyed to see Marianna and went for cool drinks.

A few minutes later when they were seated in the shade under the trees, the two collies romping together, Marianna said, "It's so peaceful here and at Hilltop, Camellia. Sometimes don't you hate to go away?"

"Yes," Camellia admitted, "but we'll be coming back eventually. Things can't go on the same, Marianna; everyone needs a change."

"But if—if Uncle Bruce hadn't waked up, you probably would, wouldn't you? I mean, have gone along just the same here as you always had?"

"I don't know, I'm not sure. We're never sure about the future. In time I might have gotten fond enough of Stephen Gray to marry him. I'm not sure."

"But you're really happy now, aren't you?"

"How can you ask? Sometimes I think people don't deserve such happiness. I don't think I'll ever complain again. I'm not even very worried about leaving John now because it won't be long before he marries Madge Evans. It will be a good thing for both of them. I know she really adores him, and while John never says very much, I know he has matrimony on his mind."

"Remember Glenda Carlson, the nurse, and Dr. Bill Drake?"

"Yes, I met them at your party, and you told me about the day they came up here to Hilltop."

"They're going to be married soon, too. Bill at last gave in and says he won't object to Glenda's working a while longer —rather, he objects, but he's willing. That makes three marriages we're interested in in the near future."

"What about you?" Camellia asked.

"I'll not ever marry Stan," Marianna said pensively. "I just don't like him that well, and I don't admire him a lot, either. Oh, I suppose he's average, but when it comes to spending the rest of your life with a man, you want a little above average Camellia"—Marianna paused and her voice sounded wistful when she said—"I don't believe I will ever be happy at home again with my old crowd, doing the things I used to do. I simply have no enthusiasm for it any more—and I don't know what to do with my life."

"Don't worry about it. It will come out all right. You're young; just go ahead and have a good time and do whatever you wish. The right man will come along some time. I thought for a while that you were seriously interested in that Dr. Randall."

Marianna said frankly, "I wouldn't say this to anyone but you, Camellia. I've never mentioned it to Aunt Mary. Before I ever went back, before I knew that I could ever walk again, Dr. Randall came up here one day and took me off for lunch down in the village."

"I remember your telling me about it."

"I think he was in love with me then; at least, he told me he was He asked me to marry him. He said he wanted me to know that my being crippled made no difference to him."

Marianna's eyes were turned away; she spoke dreamily as though she were talking about something unreal—something that happened a long time ago.

"But what changed him? You mean he wasn't like that after you went home?"

"He's never said a word to indicate he was in love with me since he knew I could walk again. He's been friendly when I happened to see him, and that has been only a few times since the reception. Each time he was friendly, yet distant, and when I told him that I might go with my aunt on a long cruise, he didn't seem very interested."

"A strange way to act," Camellia said musingly. "I can't understand it. Do you suppose he thought you might make it up with Stan again?"

"If he were really in love with me, he wouldn't wait for me to make it up with Stan; he would try to prevent it."

"Well, you have something there, of course, but there must be some reason."

"Perhaps he just decided he was not in love with me, after all."

"He doesn't seem to be a fickle sort of person. How have you acted with him? Have you changed any in your manner toward him?"

"Well, after that first night, after he knew that I could walk again and he seemed so changed, I suppose I did. I couldn't throw myself at him. I thought he would be so happy for me and that everything would come out all right."

"Give it time. If he's the one for you, it will come out all right. If he isn't, you'll meet the right one yet. Are you in love with him?"

"Yes," Marianna said without hesitation. "I'm very much in love with him, and I admire him more than any other man I've ever known. After knowing him and Uncle Bruce, other men seem uninteresting, especially men like Stanley Webster."

"You're staying at Hilltop awhile?"

"A week. Then I must go back and start planning for our trip. You'll let me be at your wedding? I don't see why you don't have a big ceremony."

"I don't think it's suitable for people of our ages. Big weddings are for young people. Remember, I had that once, so did he, so it wouldn't be a novelty for us. We'll be married in a church, I think, but there won't be anyone there but the witnesses. We both prefer it that way. And, yes, do go with us. I'm sure that would please Bruce."

It was late afternoon when Marianna drove back to Hilltop. Martha had gone to the barn, so she wandered through the old house, loving it, having a feeling that she was home again. Martha had unpacked her bag and put her things away. Uncle Bruce had gone to the village, but Martha said he would be at home for dinner.

They talked at dinner about the trip Bruce and Camellia would take. They already had their passports and visas; there remained a vaccination or two for both of them. He was outlining their itinerary to her, and she could see that he had planned a most wonderful and educational trip. She knew Camellia would love every moment of it. Then he asked her about her own trip and was surprised that she showed such little interest. Aunt Mary was planning it, she said. She knew they were going to England and then probably on to France. They had first contemplated just a cruise to the West Indies, but Aunt Mary had decided she wanted to see London again.

Marianna was walking about the moonlighted grounds with Jock when she heard a car. She wondered who it could be.

It was a light-colored car, looking silver in the moonlight. A man got out and seeing her, walked toward her.

"You look too beautiful to be real," he said smiling, not touching her. "Like a goddess of moonlight, so ethereal and fragile."

"But I'm very human," Marianna said, happily looking into Philip Randall's eyes. "I thought perhaps you had forgotten that."

"I haven't forgotten anything at all, Marianna. I haven't forgotten that I told you I loved you, that I wanted to marry you."

Marianna could only say wonderingly, "You haven't?"

"Not at all. I always intended to say it again, but I became frightened when you were well and had turned into a golden butterfly again, with everyone including your friend Stan fluttering around you."

"But I didn't turn into a butterfly again," Marianna said protestingly. "I've not felt that way at all. I wondered why you—well, just stopped calling."

"It was because I wanted to give you a chance to decide. A chance to see whether you wanted to resume your old life again, and if you did, I knew you would not be happy with me because I don't like that sort of life. When I learned

this afternoon that you had come back to Hilltop, I thought I had my answer. If you had gone back to the old way, I didn't think you would be interested in coming back up here."

"I haven't gone back to the old way," Marianna said. "I never shall. I don't like that way of life any more. And it almost broke my heart thinking you had changed your mind. I came up here to think about it."

"Well, I haven't changed my mind," he said, his voice gentle but definite. "I'm in love with you, my darling, and I want you to marry me soon. You will, won't you?"

"Of course." Marianna smiled into his eyes. "And we can go away on a cruise too, can't we?"

"Of course. Majorca?"

"Majorca," she repeated as he took her in his arms.

A BRIGHTER DAWN

Marianna Marshall would be willing to marry Stanley Webster, but on her own terms. Beautiful and wealthy, she refused to accept the thought of having to give up *any* of her freedom.

And when handsome Dr. Philip Randall came to town, it was inevitable that Marianna meet him. With his reputation for indifference to women, he was an irresistible challenge . . .

Willfully and heartlessly, Maria[illegible] planned her game of [illegible] with Philip . . . until her p[illegible] and world were abru[illegible] shatte[illegible]

AN AIRMONT [illegible] ROMA[illegible]

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